LETTIE

—OR THE—

WHIRLWIND'S REAPER

ADDIE L. MILLER

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E.D.M.

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BY

ADDIE L. MILLER

"If those who sowed to the wind did reap the whirlwind, it would be well; but the mischief is that the victims are principally amongst the innocent, the unoffenders."—*Adapted.*

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THE WHIRLWIND'S REAPER

CHAPTER I

THE GYPSY'S PREDICTIONS

GOLDENROD and asters in pastures and hedgerows, the white of bursting cotton bolls, the purple of ripening grapes, the red and gold of the orchard fruit, even the reddening stems of the Russian thistle give warning that summer is passing. But here, even in the woodland, one could still feel the sultry air of a summer day. Even the lake which gleamed plainly through the trees showed the sailing craft lying still as though becalmed, waiting for a breath of air to drive them along. Out through the trees came the figure of a young woman. She turned and slowly began to ascend the path that led into the woodland and where she expected to find the ferns and vines with which to decorate, for Lettie Armstrong was to entertain her classmates at luncheon and the class colors were gold and green. Lettie had just gathered some beautiful ferns when she heard the sound of an automobile horn and the barking of Sport, the dog. Stepping out into the path leading to the lake and which gave her a view of the house, she heard the class call and saw a quartet of young women headed her way, guided by Marie, the maid.

Greeting them, she said, "I waited until I gave up all hopes of your coming out to help me, so started out alone."

"Oh, but it's lovely here, like fairyland," spoke up tall, graceful Winnie Shetland.

"Rather a place of dreamland, I should say," said Elenor Spenser.

"Either fairyland or dreamland, whichever you choose to call it, but if we are to get the decorating done before luncheon time, I, Godmother, do order the fairies of the woodland to get to work and gather the goldenrod and ferns of this, their fairyland."

As they gathered the wild flowers, Viola Minor kept close to Lettie who noticed that Viola was strangely silent. "What has put a cloud over thy generally lively disposition, my fond cousin?"

"Not anything of great importance. I had my fortune told yesterday by Queen Isabell of the gypsy camp; something she told me left a great impression on me. Somehow I can't help thinking of what she said."

"It surely must have been something of great importance to change you so. What wonderful tale did her ladyship unfold to you?"

"I will tell you sometime when we are alone, but on the square, Lettie, if you haven't your program completed for the day, wouldn't it be great sport for all to get our fortunes told? I should like to hear what she would tell the others."

"A capital idea! I'll go over my program and find a place for this. I think we have enough vines and flowers to decorate a dozen interiors, so I think I'll call the others and countermarch to the house."

Of all the glorious times the class had held, this one had outdone them all. They had worked, as Lettie expressed it, like beavers to get the decorating finished and if the woodland had been the fairies' fortress, the house, indeed, was their castle.

The luncheon had been served, the toasts given and although the toasts were not delivered with liquid, they were by no means dry ones. There came a lull only for a few private conversations; Viola gave Lettie a significant look, indicating that the opportune time for filling in the program had arrived.

"Girls, what do you say to having your fortune told?"

"Who, where?" all in one accord and as in one breath.

"By Queen Isabell who hails from the encampment located at the entrance of the lake grounds. Had mine told yesterday."

"Do tell us what she said."

"Not for worlds would I inform you. I want to see if she gives you all the same lingo that she did me."

"What if there are a number waiting already at the tent?" suggested some one.

"We will bring her up here."

"Suited to the word, we all agree. Go down and get her."

The gypsy queen had been persuaded to come after a few coins had been put into her palm.

The fireplace up in the woods had been selected and their fortunes were to be told by tea grounds. The fireplace was a high chimney built out of field

stones with a complete fireplace; a table formed from a huge stone like a grinding-mill wheel, laid flat on a tree trunk; seats made with backs, cut out of solid tree trunks, and long rustic benches were placed here and there, while beyond was another fireplace more like the common clambake fireplaces with iron grates on top, with wooden benches around and a table, while north of the large fireplace was a shed or log cabin which contained a stove and dishes of all descriptions.

While Viola went after the gypsy, Lettie led the class up to the fireplace and with wood which was at hand soon had the tea brewing. At the queen's arrival, all attention was centered on her. She was a picturesque figure, arrayed in every color of the rainbow, black and red predominating. Beads of various description and color adorned her neck, loops of them reaching to her waist. On her arms were bracelets of quaint and unique designs. Her head was bound with a scarf of many hues. Her feet encased in sandals. She wore no stockings. Her bright red skirt covered in characteristic figures done in black, reaching just below her knees, showed her tanned and sunburnt skin.

One by one their fortunes were told with mirth and hilarity. They joked and teased each other, and as they bade each other good-bye that night until their next year's meeting they declared this one the best ever. The farewells had been said. The shadows of night were fast appearing.

Sitting in the firelight, its dying glow throwing shadows over the fireplace, was Lettie, dreaming of the past, present, and future as told by the gypsy.

She had told true facts in regard to the past, the present so far. What of the future? Black, indeed, looked the future, and what of her aunt's actions after the guests had departed? There had been uneasiness suggested, and she felt there was yet more to be heard from her aunt, but surely this was her father's house and estate. Why should her aunt have spoken as she had that evening? Her thoughts wandered back to the past. Her father's sudden death — what had he tried, with his paralyzed tongue, to tell her? It had been like a hideous nightmare from which she had awakened to find that her aunt, whom she had hardly known, had taken possession of the place. Florine had gone back to school, for her sister and aunt could not get along together. Florine was highstrung and resented the high hand of authority with which her aunt governed the household. Why had he, in his will, given over the care of his home —? Slowly Lettie dropped off into dreamland, lying in the cozy chair her father so often had sat in. Over and over again she dreamed of the gypsy queen and her predictions.

Suddenly she was aroused from her slumber to find her aunt standing over her.

"It's time you were in your bed. I intended to have a talk with you and found you were not in your room. I suppose I may as well have my talk here with you. There may be no better time than the present. I have disliked to tell you of our financial standing. I find that we cannot live on what money we have, as we have been doing in the past, and I have thought that your education might be the means of helping us out."

"You mean that I should put my talent or education to practical use?"

"Yes, that is one thought I had, and then there was another one which suggested itself to me. That was for you to marry Mr. Mathews. He has interest in your father's estate and has hinted that to combine those interests would be agreeable to him."

"But, Aunt Fanny, I don't love Mr. Mathews, I hardly know him."

"What has love to do with marriages? If you like the man you soon learn to love him; it's better than marrying a man for love and finding out afterwards that you despise him; one way is as wise as the other."

"But I thought Cousin Viola and Mr. Mathews thought a great deal of each other."

"Not a bit of it, I intend Viola to be a duchess some day and if you will marry Mathews it will leave us in better circumstances until I can pull this match off. Besides, when you are around the Duke has no eyes for any one else."

"I am sorry you think that way, but I assure you I have no liking for the Duke. I cannot understand our being in financial straits. I supposed father had left us considerable wealth."

"Yes, but when I took hold of the management I found the estate pretty well wrapped in debt, and as young Mathews is much interested in you, I sized up the situation and find the best way out of the difficulty is to do as I have said."

"But surely you don't mean I shall fling myself at him, Auntie."

"You foolish child, of course not, just leave it to

me. He will jump at the chance to get you, my dear."

"I had always resolved to marry for love if I married at all. This looks like a mercenary affair, and such I despise."

"I think you will have to put all your fancies and despisings to windward, for young Mathews is considered a fine catch and most girls wouldn't stop to think of sentiment. They would jump at the chance to get him. You had better go to your room now, and in the morning you will think better of this."

As she disrobed for the night Lettie realized for the first time what her aunt meant by her suggestive words that evening after the departure of her classmates.

Her sleep was restless and broken; not but what she liked Mathews, but to marry him was quite another thing. The next morning her health showed the result of her broken night's rest, and hastily sipping a few mouthfuls of coffee she started out for a walk in the clear morning air, hoping to be benefited from her close touch with nature. Walking along the path that bordered the lake, Sport barking as he ran back and forth ahead of her, finally darting toward the cove, Lettie following him saw an object lying on the ground which proved to be an aeroplane from which emerged the form of a man.

"I followed Sport and he led me here." She spoke hesitatingly, then a smile spread across her face as she looked up and recognized Howard Mathews.

"Good morning, Miss Armstrong, I am trespas-

sing, I am afraid, but I assure you it was not my intention to do so. I was trying my new invention and it simply refused to go in the direction I wished and insisted in landing here."

"I am surprised. I had no knowledge that you were such a genius or an inventor. I feel honored in making your acquaintance, Sir Mathews."

"Don't mention it, for I am afraid the thing has turned turtle and put me in a hole."

"Being an inventor you should be able to repair the damage and not feel obliged to stay in the hole."

"As far as that goes, my difficulties seem easy enough to pull out of, but the way the infernal thing acts means more work. Not only time and study, but financial backing. That's where the shoe pinches."

"I had supposed your pockets to be well supplied with that necessary article."

"Whoever your informer was, that person was certainly laboring under a delusion. I have not only invested in my invention but sunk a little in real estate, and it's ready money that acts the quickest at these times. I'll have to go after my man Judson to get this high-stepping apparatus back into the shop again. Are you going my way? I am going up by the ice house and if you are going that way I will, with your permission, accompany you."

What a lovely companion he was, as he strode lightly along and talked of his invention. Only too soon was her destination reached.

"I am sorry to have to leave your company, Miss Armstrong. It was been a pleasant walk, and

this delightful morning seems to have agreed with you for your cheeks have been painted the deepest of red by nature's artist. But the best of friends have to part at times." He tipped his hat and continued his way.

She went up the steps but did not enter the house, instead she sat down on the rustic bench. She had taken a great liking to him that morning; perhaps he would return with the men that way. She would wait.

Lettie was light-haired with melancholy blue eyes, a perfect blond. Mathews was dark-eyed, with hair as black as a raven's, a pronounced brunette. She had always thought of him in connection with her cousin. What a fine pair they made! And she was sure that Viola loved him, but her aunt would throw Viola in the Duke's way, for she had spent lavishly to entertain the Duke. Her ambition was for her daughter to marry a title; that would put them away up on the social scale of their wealthy neighbors whose standing now on the social ladder was far above theirs. Her aunt had asked Lettie to marry Mathews not only for financial reasons but probably to remove him from Viola's path; to make way for the Duke. Both were to throw their happiness away, to make marriage a mere lottery for mere gain of gold and position. She did like Mathews after that morning walk. He was such a fine example of manhood; but to love or marry him was a subject which she had never given a thought.

They were coming that way, he and his men. Tipping his hat he asked, "Are you waiting to see us bring that unlucky piece of mechanism back?

We shall come back this way, I presume." He had in a way asked her to remain there.

He stopped to converse with her and she invited him to a seat. He spoke to her in regard to his mother; of his love for her, of how he had often wished there had been a sister to leave with the mother when he was away.

"Perhaps she will have a daughter sometime. You should make that provision for her because of your love for her," she said. She had spoken earnestly, thinking of Viola and himself.

"If, Miss Lettie, I should find that one, I should have to first be sure of my financial position, and no telling when that would be."

"But if she cared for you and could unravel such difficulties?"

Could she mean what she was saying? Did she know? Had Mrs. Minor, her aunt, told the girl? It was preposterous, the very thought of it. The aunt surely did not have any evidence who held the interest in the estate, yet she had spoken candidly and confidently.

"If she cared, if I cared," he said, "would mean a great deal in the transaction that is to be found out." He gazed into her eyes as though to search her very soul.

At that moment, Marie, the maid, came toward them. "Miss Lettie, there is a telephone call, and as they said it was very urgent, I came down for you."

"All right, Marie. Good morning, Mr. Mathews, and better luck to you at your net trial. Please send me an invitation to be a spectator," and with laughter she left him.

CHAPTER II

THE PROPOSAL

DAYS and weeks had gone by and she and Mathews had been thrown often into each other's company, although Viola always shared their sports and pleasures. Viola had gone on a trip to the city. Lettie missed her gay companionship and calling Sport started for a jaunt through the woodland. As they neared the big open fireplace Sport gave a whining yelp of delight. She stopped and listened, but not another sound did he make. As she came into the opening she saw Howard Mathews bending and stroking Sport's head. He looked up as she advanced toward them.

"Good morning, Miss Lettie. I thought either you or Miss Viola must not be far off when I heard Sport."

"I thought you had an important engagement for today? I assure you it is a most welcome surprise to find you here."

"I did have an important engagement for today and I am trying to fulfil it."

For a moment the fear had come to her that she was trespassing on forbidden ground as an unwelcome guest. Only yesterday he had announced an important engagement for today. Viola had also left, presumably for the city. She had not asked

Lettie as usual to accompany her and this probably was the engagement and this their trysting place, which she had unintentionally entered.

"I am sincerely sorry, Mr. Mathews, that I have trespassed upon your engagement hours. I did not know of your presence here. If I had I should not have intruded."

"I am afraid, Miss Lettie, that I am the trespasser, of which your tone and actions warn me. I beg your leniency in this case for the trees are fast becoming barren of their foliage and I was eager to get a good painting of this enchanting fireplace and its surroundings before it became practically denuded of its beautiful foliage."

Lettie's face flushed. For the first time she noticed his easel and other equipments of his artistic skill.

"I did not know you were an artist. You seem to be able to spring surprises on us at every turn."

"Not an artist. Merely a dauber, a disturber of nature's beauty; but won't you take a seat while I go on with my disturbing? I'll soon be through and then we can walk back together, unless you haven't quite forgiven me for trespassing."

"I never thought you a trespasser. I thought it was I who was trespassing — I — well I can't just explain — I — you know, Viola went away today. You had an engagement and when I found you here, I thought —"

"You thought that Viola and I had a definite agreement for a meeting here today. Now isn't that the correct completion of your sentence, Lettie?"

She did not answer him.

"The truth, Lettie."

"Yes, that's just what I did think."

"And what if she were to meet me here?"

"Nothing at all. She has a right to meet you here, to be near you if she wishes."

"Do you think she cares for me more than just as a friend?"

"I don't know — why do you ask me? Why don't you ask her?"

"For the reason that there is but one woman that I care to be near at all and I have tried to probe her to find out if she too cared for me. Lettie, I feel as though I always wanted to be near you, to shield you from all the bitter storms of life. I have been attracted to many a woman, but you are the only woman I have been so strangely drawn to and whom I desired to ask to marry me. Will you be my wife?"

She looked up at him, gazing earnestly into his eyes, as if trying to read in them the truth of his declaration. Slowly she said, "You do not seem to manifest any fear as to whether I love you."

"If you don't, you will," he answered with a smile.

"Would you have me marry you, knowing that I do not love you?"

"But I think you must care for me a little — love me, don't you?"

"I do like you — perhaps more than like you, but I do not love you — not yet."

"Not yet, but will. Is that it?"

"I don't know what to say. How am I to know

that this friendship will end in that love that calls to nearly every woman some time in her life?"

"Then you love no other man?"

"No."

Once more be bent over her. Eagerly he said, "Then marry me and I know you will love me in time."

"I don't know what to say," she murmured. "Give me time."

"Say yes," he spoke, ardently.

Suddenly she felt his hand close over hers. Gently he drew her to him. She did not resist but lowered her eyes, feeling that delicious thrill at the sensation of this big, strong man's love for her. "Tell me — tell me, Lettie, will you marry me?"

"Lettie, where are you?" came a call from down the woodland path and Viola appeared. As she came toward them something in their attitude told her that Howard Mathews' interest in her cousin was more than mere friendship.

Lettie held out the beautiful wild flowers she had gathered. "Here's a specimen you haven't seen before for your botany studies," she exclaimed.

"Thanks. Where in all this wilderness did you find such a unique and rare specimen?"

"Down over the knoll there. Come and I'll show you."

"We haven't time. Mother sent me to find you, for dinner is almost ready and if you don't hurry it will all be devoured by the time we reach there. You know Marie's standard, punctuality. Come on everybody," and chatting away, she told them of missing the train and her resolve to return.

As they neared the wide road, "the parting of the ways," as the cousin had nicknamed it, for running south it led to the most exclusive set, the four hundred, while turning to the north, it led to the young women's home, Mathews lifted his cap and bade them good evening.

"Why, aren't you coming too?" asked Viola.

"I did not know that the invitation included me," he answered.

"Indeed it did."

"In that case I most willingly accept and certainly feel honored by the invitation."

Although Lettie felt thrilled and delighted, she divined his questioning look.

As they entered that home with its old colonial furniture which Lettie's and Florine's father had shipped from foreign shores, from their own mother's home, and placed here, and which she never lived to see nor enjoy in this new home, there came the thought to Lettie that she never wished to leave this lovely home. If she married Howard Mathews she would not have to lose it, for had not Aunt Fanny said his fortune was linked with her father's in this estate? She would give him his answer that night before he left.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS WOMAN

THE summer home of the Armstrongs was built on the old colonial plan with spacious rooms, situated on a knoll overlooking the lake called Whitemere, meaning white lake. The furnishings of the home had been selected with great care, most of it having been brought across the water, beautiful antiques of generations past. In the large reception hall of this beautiful home the guests had assembled to see Lettie Armstrong united in marriage to the young inventor.

She heard the words that made them man and wife, the greeting of their friends, and then she left him to change her bridal robe for her traveling suit. As she ascended the stairs she heard a woman's voice pleading to see Mr. Mathews. She heard the butler telling some one that it was his wedding day. Then she heard the woman saying, "But he must not enter into this marriage. It must be stopped."

"He is already married," spoke the butler.

"Married — he — after ruining my life! He is the father of my child. What shall I do?"

Then Lottie saw the butler lead her toward the door, but she broke away from his detaining hand and making her way through to the guests she went straight up to Howard Mathews.

Lettie saw him start as if a sudden surprise had been sprung upon him; then take the woman by the arm and gently lead her through the vestibule past the stairs where she, his newly wedded wife, now stood, and she heard him say, "We will go where we can be alone and talk this thing over."

Lettie hastened to her room as soon as her trembling limbs would let her. For a few minutes she sat there dazed and then Marie entered the room. Still she sat there.

"Miss Lettie, are you ill? You are dreadfully pale."

"No — yes! Marie, you can and must do something for me at once. Will you watch for the woman who, at present, is in Mrs. Minor's private room with Mr. Mathews? Watch her and bring her back with you. Don't let any one see you. Come by the back stairway. Go now, at once, and don't come back without her. I *must* see her!"

Marie had gone and she was alone. That woman! Who was she? Should she have sent for her? Would it not have been better to have first asked an explanation from him? Was this woman more to him than she, who had been a wife but a little while? Had he married her because their financial life was linked and he wanted to win honor and fame? Had she come in between this woman and the man she loved and unwittingly been the ruin of this woman's life? No! she would drag the story from this woman, whatever it was, whatever she was to Howard Mathews.

How the time dragged! Would Marie never return?

A knock and Marie entered. "Miss Lettie, the woman has been sent away but I have the address she gave me. It is 144 Elmwood Street."

"Marie, tell John to have the auto in waiting at the back entrance."

"But Miss Lettie —"

"Listen! Not a word. I am going to that address; as soon as you have given my order assist me into one of my old dresses."

In a short time they were descending the back stairs and, entering the auto, were swiftly whirled away.

A carriage had just drawn up in front of No. 144, a neat, trim little cottage. As the auto came in sight of it, from the carriage stepped the woman whom Lettie had seen in conversation with the butler. Lettie, without a moment's hesitation, addressed the woman. At the woman's invitation she entered the cottage. As if in answer to a question put by Lettie she pointed to a cot in the room. On the cot lay a little child between two and three years old, pale, emaciated; then to Lettie's queries she opened a bureau drawer and taking a photo therefrom, handed it to Lettie.

There was no mistake. It was an exact profile of Howard Mathews, the man to whom she herself had been wedded less than an hour ago. With a few more words to the woman Lettie left the cottage and reëntered the auto. Before they reached her home Lettie had formed her plans. The wrong done this woman should be righted.

As soon as they reached her room Lettie commanded Marie, "Change my dress at once for

my traveling suit; then, when I am ready, summon Mr. Mathews." Soon she was ready for her journey.

Marie: "Yes, Miss Lettie, I will go at once for Mr. Mathews."

"No, I have changed my mind. I will go down myself to him." She was trying to gain more time in which to collect herself. She descended the stairs as bravely as she could until she reached the portières separating the reception room. There she hesitated to gain the courage she felt so sorely in need of. Mathews and Joyce, old friends, were in trivial conversation. "I often wondered, Mathews, what ever became of that old flame of yours, quite a stunning little girl she was, by Jove! I have wondered how you ever got the courage to shake the sweet, young creature!" She heard Joyce's words plainly and her husband's who replied: "Oh, it lasted about as long as those affairs usually last. We had our quarrel; I cleared out right then and there. I couldn't bear to have any argument. Haven't heard from her since. We all sow our wild oats sooner or later — the earlier the better. Good thing I dropped the affair or this day of all days would not have occurred."

"Yes, this marriage is to be preferred. More to your credit. More of a convenient one socially, financially, and all that. Eh, Mathews?" Mathews glanced at his watch.

"By Jove! time's going! I wonder if that little wife of mine isn't about ready." He stepped toward the doorway. Just then Lettie appeared. "Lettie, dear," he said, as he caught sight of her, "we will

have but a few minutes in which to catch the train."

Lettie tried to be calm as she spoke to him in a low tone. "Who was that strange woman who insisted on seeing you tonight?"

He did not answer at once. Finally he said, "Some woman who I think must be demented, through some fancied wrong. Thought me to be some one whom I must resemble. I pacified her by promising to look after her. Are you ready, dear?" He bent to caress her but she turned from him; then with a hysterical laugh she took his arm.

She descended the stairs, her heart beating like an imprisoned bird trying to escape from its cage, but she greeted them all with a smile upon her lips.

The good-byes had been said and Howard handed her into the auto. During the drive to the station she was gaiety itself and was glad when they arrived at the station to find that there would be no long wait for the train.

At last their destination was reached. What a long ride it had been. She wondered in after years how she had ever stood that journey.

As he was about to sign at the desk, she spoke, "Mr. Mathews, if you please, a room by myself."

"Just as you wish, Lettie, but why this—Mr. Mathews?"

"You must excuse me. I am unnerved," and she smiled up into his face.

What a modest little woman she was! How bravely she tried to smile while he could see the very trembling of her lips! How he longed to take her in his arms and kiss them!

As they were ushered into their suite, he asked her, "Do you not wish some refreshments? They can be brought up to the room. It is early yet."

"Nothing, please, I — I just want to be alone."

"Lettie, what has so unnerved you? There must be something wrong."

She glanced up at him, "Perhaps you might reason out the real cause for the worry."

"Are you objecting to a kindness, a mere courtesy, given on an impulse, and to quite a deluded creature who insisted on a fancied wrong being righted, and to pacify her and keep her from making a disturbance I had to have sent away? Why Lettie, what has my conscience to worry about?"

She was silent.

"Well," he said, "if such a little thing turned you, you could have had but little faith in me when you married me."

As though in memory she answered, "If you don't love me, you will in time."

"Would you have done so, Lettie?"

"I would have tried."

He looked at her appealingly, "I can't understand your lack of faith."

"Whatever I lack is based upon your own words, secretly spoken."

"And you let these trifles overshadow your wifehood, what a fine thing in itself your love would have been."

He had spoken with satire.

"Listen, Howard Mathews, solve this mystery without a possible doubt, then you can claim me in wifehood and perhaps my love."

"And in the meantime, Lettie, you will let me provide for you?"

"If I need you I will send for you."

"I am placed in a position at the present time to judge you also; perhaps there is another link in your own life that makes you repent at the last moment this step you have taken of becoming my wife."

"I resent that insinuation. You are making dramatics of the whole situation because I will not be blind in lending myself to be a partner in your financial scheme. I thank God I didn't have the knowledge of love to make me blind to the honor, and trusting love of my own sex."

"And you are trying to make yourself believe I do not love you with all the strength of my manhood. What do you intend to do for the future, Lettie?"

"Readjust my value as a wife, to refuse to bear your name before the world until you can explain."

He stood gazing at her helpless, then walking towards the door, turned and said, "I wish you a restful night, Lettie."

"Thank you."

"Good-night." With his hand on the door knob he waited expectantly.

All she said was, "Good-night."

Glad indeed was she to be alone, to sit and plan, to perfect her decision. In the small hours of the morning she had planned it all out; she would not bear his name unless the law so demanded. A wife in name only was to be her lot, for the sin of ruining two lives should not rest upon her soul. She finally threw herself upon the bed to snatch, if possible, a few hours' rest, but sleep would not come and as

the dawn of day appeared she arose and prepared her toilet for the day.

She dressed with care. She had begun in the early hours so as to start before he should arise. She rang the bell and when the maid appeared she handed her a letter asking her to deliver it to Mr. Mathews in number forty-one at the hour he was to be called, but no sooner, and she slipped a coin into the maid's hand.

Hastily donning her wraps she descended the stairs and was soon whirling away. This thought came to her. Where should she go until she was calm enough to face the situation? She puzzled over this problem and then came the thought of Marie. Surely she could go to Marie or her sister, Nancy, until she could better herself.

Nancy was surprised to see Lettie but listened patiently to her explanation and her side of the right as she saw it.

Nancy was glad to be of any service to Lettie and was glad to help her out. "To be sure, Miss Lettie, I will help you out, for your aunt is looking for the financial part of this affair. She was glad to wash her hands of you, and has been busy baiting her hook so as to catch the Duke for Viola, and she, poor girl, did set store on Mr. Mathews. Honestly, that mother of hers is so cold she would freeze you to look at her. Marie says you would never think she was stingy, but that she pounces on every penny as though it was a gold coin."

"Aunt Fanny means all right and I do not doubt but that at present she is a little financially embar-

rassed. I think I will get a paper and see if I can find a suitable situation offered."

"Lands! Miss Lettie, you don't intend to go out to service, do you?"

"Not exactly as you look at it, but I thought I could find a place as governess or better still, as a private secretary."

"You must feel upset over this affair, Miss Lettie, when you won't let this Mr. Mathews support you. He's a fine young man."

"I know that, but would you like to be thrown at a man for support when you knew he loved another?" She had not told Nancy the full particulars — that of the other woman.

"But you are a wife to be proud of. There's nothing about you to disgrace any one. Just think of the way you have been reared and of the fine education, gentle birth and everything to make the lady of you that you are."

"Yes, I know all this is true; all but one. That is my birth. I really do not know about that. I never doubted in regard to it until I heard my aunt speak about it one day, but I think I will look over this paper now. I am eager to begin my new life of independence."

Lettie eagerly scanned that advertisement column, but nothing to her entire satisfaction could be found.

"Nancy, would you just as soon go out and get me some other paper?"

"Sure, I'll go. I would do anything you asked me to."

"Thank you, Nancy, you are the best friend I have now."

Nancy went out, daubing her eyes with her handkerchief. She couldn't understand why Miss Lettie should talk like that. Soon she appeared bearing two other papers.

At last Lettie found a place which would be suited to her ability as governess. At once she prepared to go out to locate the place.

"I'll go now to look over this position; but whether I accept or not I'll return before dusk sets in."

Lettie was quite refined and her pose that of a lady born. As she walked up the steps of the brownstone front it looked like the outside of a prison to her in comparison with her own summer home, with its surrounding woodlands, and the lake with its crafts sailing across its water like white-winged birds. She stood there as in a dream, and as this vision of her home floated before her eyes she stood irresolute, almost tempted to turn back. Then her hand touched the doorbell. A maid appeared. She stood waiting. In a minute it swept across Lettie's mind — her card — and she opened her purse. Upon second thought she immediately closed it, as her own cards would not do. She must use a fictitious name.

"If Mrs. Ballystine is in tell her I have come in answer to her advertisement for a governess. I am sorry I haven't my card with me at the present."

She was ushered into a luxuriant, but what seemed to her an overcrowded parlor, after the simplicity of her own home. Soon she heard the rustle of a silken gown and a woman of about thirty-five made her appearance.

Lettie arose. "Mrs. Ballystine, I believe? I am in search of a situation and seeing your ad thought it just the place I desire, so hastened to secure it."

After a few inquiries she decided to engage Lettie.

"When can you come?"

"At once," she quickly replied.

"That will be to my liking, as my little ones are without a governess at the present time."

"I will go and get what articles I require and will be back directly."

"Then consider yourself engaged. I shall expect you back this afternoon."

Lettie hastened back with a quivering heart. At least one important thing was off her mind — she had a situation and could be independent. As she came down the steps from Nancy's house she noticed a man in gray standing near by. He glanced at her eagerly. She did not like the way he had looked at her. He was probably one of those sports who ogle every young woman they happen to see. She would dismiss the thought of him from her mind. As she entered the trolley car she saw the man in gray also get on. She tried to drive the thought of him from her mind but she felt that this man for some reason or other was watching her.

She did not see the man of the house that evening. The children were two lovely little tots and she loved them right away; and even after she had tucked them into bed and disrobed herself she crept back to see if they were all right.

In her room that night she planned to get a divorce. She could have, in time, learned to love Howard

Mathews for he was a clean-cut young man; but what could she have been to him! Merely a partner thrown at him as part of his real estate investment.

In the morning she took up her new life again. Effie and May had become engaged in a war of words which threatened to end in a fistic encounter.

"Why, I am ashamed of you both. You can't love your governess and act like that."

"It's Effie don't love you, 'cause she beginned it."

"Tain't me, eder. You was meanest firstest, so there!"

"But one can't fight alone, so both forget and forgive and kiss and make up."

May shyly crept up to her and with her large blue eyes fixed intently upon her face asked in her baby way, "Does oo always kiss up when any one hurties yours feelings, and when you don't know whose firstest fault it is?"

"Why, yes, we should, you know."

Then a deep red suffused her face. Had she shown forgiveness or gratitude? Did she know for sure that he had entered into this marriage on a financial basis or investment? How quick she had been to condemn others less wise than herself.

CHAPTER IV

HER DISMISSAL

A MONTH had gone by. She had seen Mr. Ballystine frequently, as she now always took dinner with the family. He appeared to be a man of the world, and seemed to be particularly fond of the feminine portion of it, and she never felt easy in his presence. A brother of Mrs. Ballystine was a frequent visitor there and intercepted Lettie every chance that presented itself.

Time had flown. A slight covering of snow was on the ground. Christmas was drawing near and Christmas shopping was all the vogue. Lettie was given instructions to take the little ones to the toy shops and to purchase trimmings for the tree. It was to be a joy ride for her and the little ones.

As she stepped from the auto to the curbstone her foot slipped and she would have fallen had not a strong hand seized her. She glanced up to thank her rescuer. It was the man in gray, the sport, as she had learned to designate him.

"I can take care of myself, thank you. It would be a pleasure to me if you would disengage my arm. I do not know why you should always be watching me. I would advise you to keep your distance hereafter."

"Very well, madam, if you so desire, but my duties compel me to look after you and I shall

endeavor to do so until I am ordered to do otherwise."

She bit her lips at his words. So she was being watched and it had been ordered done. She hastened to get May and Effie, and in sharing their joys of Toyland, she forgot the embarrassing situation of the afternoon.

The next day she was busy trimming the Christmas tree when Mrs. Ballystine's brother entered the room.

"So I see the fairy has been trimming the tree into a thing of beauty."

"Thank you, Colonel Henry, for your good impression of me, but I assure you that I take it as mere flattery. There is nothing fairy about me."

"A woman's hand and a true heart changes many a comely thing into a fairy being; and with the blessing of tiny feet, a man's life, indeed, is blessed."

"I am glad, Colonel, you feel that way. I have often wondered why your life is not so crowned."

"I lead too busy a life, Miss Morrison. I never stopped to think of those things until late years. Then, one much younger than myself entered my life and since then I have tried to find the opportunity to ask her to share my life."

"I take it, it is courage that you need. A man who has served his country should be brave enough to face one of the gentle sex. I am surprised at you, Colonel."

"Then, you would advise me to go ahead?"

"I certainly should. How would you know your fate otherwise? She certainly can only refuse you if she don't accept you. A man who has undergone

fire and shell of battle can stand against a woman's refusal, or such a little affair as the heart."

"Miss Morrison, do you know I picked out this Christmas day to ask some one to be my wife?"

"The better the day the better the deed."

"Ahem! Yes, I think so. Ahem! I think I better show you the ring first."

"It's a beauty and the possessor should be very proud of that. She will, I am sure, accept it," said Lettie.

He grasped her hand. "Miss Morrison, you have given me so much courage. I have loved you ever since you entered this house. I want you to be my wife, my helpmate."

"But Colonel Henry, I don't love you. I can't be your wife. The very thought is preposterous."

"But you have given me encouragement and I bought this ring especially for you."

"I am truly sorry that you have gone to this expense and trouble. Most women would be proud of your proposal, but I assure you that I regret that I cannot accept your offer of marriage."

"Take the ring. Put it away until you think better of my proposal. Just make a promise to keep the ring and to wear it sometime."

"As I said before, I honor and respect your offer, but I cannot accept your ring, for I am bound in holy wedlock to another."

He dropped like a log into his chair. For a moment there was silence.

"I understood you were a Miss. My sister is not aware of the fact that you are otherwise. Am I to understand —?"

"No, I did not consider it necessary to inform Mrs. Ballystine."

"But if my sister had known that you were a married woman she may have considered your application in a different light."

"I am sincerely sorry if I have done wrong in not informing her, but I did not think the facts in the case warranted my family tree being exposed. As I have duties elsewhere, I shall have to excuse myself. Good morning, Colonel Henry."

"My, but she is a proud one! Well, we will see; perhaps when my sister gets wind of this thing she may take some of that haughtiness out of you, my fine young bird." With this he strutted out of the room.

Christmas had come and gone and Lettie had just finished dressing the next morning, when there came a knock on the door.

"Miss Morrison, the mistress wishes to see you as soon as possible. She is in her private room downstairs."

Lettie felt that the inevitable was about to occur and she was more than sure of that fact when she confronted Mrs. Ballystine, whose features only too plainly showed the wrath of the storm about to explode.

"Miss Morrison, or rather *Mrs.*, of the last of which I was ignorant, I have been informed you are a married woman. Is this true? Or is it just a plan to ward off and save my brother from his hot-headed folly?"

"I cannot deny that I am a married woman, but that is no —"

"And you deliberately come here, creep into my home, a companion to my little innocent lambs; come with your false heart, perhaps blackened character, who knows? Who are you? What is your sin or dark secret that compels you to hide your marriage?"

"Stop, Mrs. Ballystine, you have gone far enough! I did not creep into your home a wolf in sheep's clothing. You did not ask me if I was married. I did not consider it necessary to tell you, and I did not know that it made any difference in my position. As for my character, my marriage, both are honorable. I am a wife in name only. As for my birth, I cannot give you any information now, but some day I shall know. For the present I must be silent."

"And you admit, bold-faced, that you are a married woman, yet you give me no explanation. Do I understand that you will not explain?"

"I cannot."

"Then you admit you came into our midst with a false heart? I do not wish my children brought up in falsehood. If you will come to me when you are ready I will see that you receive your salary."

"By that I infer that I am discharged. Very well, Mrs. Ballystine, I will go at once."

Going to the nursery she gathered Effie and May to her and kissed them. There were tears in her eyes.

"Why, Nursie, you're almost crying. What make you feel so bad?"

"Because, little tots, I'm going to leave you a while and some one else is coming to care for you."

"Is your mother died?" inquired little May.

"Yes, my mother died, little girl. If she had not perhaps I would not have to feel this way."

"That's too baded. My mother cried when her mother died. You don't feel so awful sorry outside. I guess it is because it's keeped in your heart and sometimes that hurties the most; but come straight back because we will be waiting for you."

"I can't promise you that, dear, but be good to the new governess and love her as you did me."

She kissed them passionately; then went to her room to get ready to go. Where? She knew not where. There was but one way — go back to Nancy, for she must save her money that she had rightfully earned until she could secure another situation, which might not be found readily. As she descended the stairs she heard voices and stood still at the mention of her name.

"And just because your brother asked the governess to marry him and she refused him? He comes and tells you that you are harboring a married woman; you get rattled and tell her to go; leave the little ones without either nurse or governess. You may never find another like her. How do you know but what he told you were lies, just for spite? What if she is married? That's no crime. Are you or any one else the worse for being married?"

"But she wouldn't explain and I —"

"Didn't explain? What if she didn't? Has she to tell her whole family affairs from her ancestors up to the present day to gratify your woman's curiosity? All I've got to say is that she is going to stay. I've never had my say in this house before, but now I am going to assert my rights."

Lettie's hand-bag fell from her hand and dropped with a thud on the floor below. With her head thrown high, her cheeks crimson, she descended the stairs, stooped, picked up her bag and stood before them, bowing slightly to her staunch friend, Mr. Ballystine.

"I am ready now to depart, Mrs. Ballystine, and if you wish to pay me the balance of my salary, I —"

"Miss Morrison, I prefer you to stay in this house as long as you wish or certainly until a new governess has been secured. My wife did not use, I am afraid, judgment or discretion in her conversation with you this morning, and I sincerely hope you will forget this little incident and let us remain as before — a united family."

He spoke with an air of pompousness and with a great deal of flourish.

"I do not consider my husband has —"

"If you please, Mrs. Ballystine, there need be no further remarks on this subject. While I thank Mr. Ballystine for his kindness in regard to my welfare, I find that I am unable to cope with the situation. It would be useless to try to persuade me to stay longer under your roof."

Mrs. Ballystine, with a smirk and a sneer, handed her the envelope containing her salary. She could not have acted more ungracious if Lettie had been a woman of the street.

Poor Lettie, her fortune as told by the gypsy queen had so far proven true. What the future held as told in the tea grounds, was yet to be unfolded. With eyes almost blinded with tears, with her chin held high in the air and a defiant expression

on her face, Lettie groped her way to the door. Down the steps she hastened just in time to take an outgoing car that would land her once more at the old trusted servant's home, her one friend in the time of need.

A half hour's ride, then the change to the steam cars, another two hours' ride, with conflicting thoughts between the right of duty as she saw it and the dream of ideal life as pictured by her months ago, these months now seem a year to her. At last her destination. The train paused long enough for the passengers to alight, then passed on. Across the street, a few more rods, and then at Nancy's door she knocked. The door opened, showing the smiling, quaint features of kind-hearted old Nancy.

"Oh, Miss Lettie, it's good to see your face once more."

"I have come to stay a while with you again if you will let me."

"For goodness sake, child, I am glad of it. Just you take off your wraps and I'll soon have a good cup of tea for you and something else from old Nancy's cupboard."

"Don't tell me what it is, Nancy. Let me wait in great expectation. Oh, but it is great, Nancy, to have one good friend. They say, 'Cast your bread upon the water and it will come back two-fold.' Yours ought to come back threefold."

"I don't know about that, Miss Lettie, but don't let's talk any more until I get that cup of tea. Then sure you must tell me everything."

The tears filled Lettie's eyes and she could hardly keep the sobs back as Nancy appeared with the tea.

Nancy laid her hand kindly on her shoulder. Her eyes swept Lettie's face. "Now, dearie, forget your troubles until you have refreshed yourself."

"It seems good to be here with you, Nancy. Everything so clean and white."

How often she and Viola had been there together! Nancy and Viola were the first to know of Howard Mathews' offer of marriage. She wondered if Viola had seen Mathews, if she knew that she was trying to right the wrong by giving back to the other woman the love that rightly belonged to her. She would ask Nancy for a little information, for she felt she must. Had she not kept silent long enough?

"Has Marie told you anything in regard to Mr. Mathews? Has Aunt Fanny seen him since the wedding day?"

"Marie said that some one called her on long distance telephone and asked her to ask Mrs. Minor if Lettie or Mrs. Mathews had been there and when she answered 'No,' the party said something about being in a strange city and afraid you had lost your way and if you did come to tell you that you would be watched until your return. Mrs. Minor said that she guessed some one had religious mania."

"Thank you, Nancy, I think I'll go out after a paper and see what luck I will run across this time."

"I'll get the paper for you and if you don't find anything that suits you in tonight's paper there may be something before long."

As Nancy left the house she was surprised to see a man in gray step out from the side of the house.

She stopped a moment to gaze at him, but it was no one she knew.

Lettie had almost given up hope of getting a situation very soon when in one of the evening papers she saw an advertisement that just suited her. Telling Nancy of her discovery, she hastily put on her wraps and left to secure the situation if possible.

Another brownstone front, but in a more fashionable neighborhood and much more luxuriously furnished than the Ballystine's. This time she would say "Mrs." There should be no misunderstanding. She gave her name as Mrs. Merriman. She secured the position as private secretary and her duties were to arrange and take part in all the social functions. This called for beautiful gowns. Three months ago her trousseau consisted of beautiful gowns which, as Aunt Fanny had announced, had taken the last of her father's fortune to fix her out in style as the wife of the young inventor. If only she had the outfit now. Where they were, she had no idea. She must have Nancy see Marie and see if she could locate her baggage. It still must be at the apartments that were to have later been her home.

"Nancy," she called hurriedly, as she entered the house, "could you call up Marie tonight for me?"

"I can, or any one else you ask me to, dearie."

"Well, go telephone and ask her if she knows where my trunks are. My wedding — I mean, the ones I was to take away with me, and if she does, see if I can get them at once."

Then she told Nancy all about her new position.

"I will go and telephone now if you wish me to."

"I wish you would. Oh, Nancy, what would I do without you?"

"Miss Lettie's clothes, why bless your heart, I know just where they are. They were never taken away from here. He told me to keep them until Miss Lettie should send for them. I'll get Uncle Ebb to cart them down right away. They will be there tomorrow sure."

As soon as she could earn her maintenance she intended to care for the child, — his child, — to do what she could for the injustice done the woman. At the first monthly payment in her new position she forwarded most of it to No. 144 Elmwood Street, keeping but a few coins for her personal use.

CHAPTER V

FACE TO FACE

"WHERE did she come from? Who is she?" was heard on all sides at Mrs. Whittman's reception. All that could be learned was that she was a young widow; some said from New York; others from Connecticut. Gowned in ivory-white Mechlin lace mounted over ivory satin, the skirt flounced from waist to hem and the corsage a discreet mixture of soft lace, pale gold embroidery, and lemon-yellow chiffon, Miss Lettie was the center of all eyes. At her waist a soft yellow rose set in dark leaves gave a rich note of color.

In and out among the guests she went, keeping watch that there should be no wallflowers. She must keep every one hustling. As she came through the large roomy vestibule she came face to face with Howard Mathews. For one instant she thought of fleeing, then she nerved herself to the situation. Glancing again at him she smiled and bowed. Then taking the arm of Mr. Joyce, who was standing near a group of men, she said, "You must help me out, Mr. Joyce. I have some young ladies whom I know are just longing for a young single man to talk to. I shall come back for you later," she said to the other men.

She saw Mathews gaze after her. She sincerely hoped he would be gone before her return. Some

time during the evening she felt that he would search her out and ask for an explanation. What explanation was there to be given? Had she not explained in her note to him?

At last fate was to intervene. As she left Joyce with the quartet of young ladies, she saw her cousin, Viola, entering the room. She must keep out of her sight until she could see her alone and explain to her. Desperate, endeavoring to escape from Viola, she entered the conservatory to plan how she could manage to see her alone.

She had been there but a few moments when she heard some one enter. She was alone no longer. They seated themselves near her hiding-place, directly behind the palms. She was forced to be an unwilling eavesdropper. She heard Mathews speaking in tender, sympathetic tones.

"I am sincerely sorry for you. A marriage without love is bad enough, but to marry with hatred in your heart is worse. I am sorry your mother has interfered in your life in this way. There must be some way out of the difficulty. She must not ruin both lives."

The other sentence was lost to her listening ear but she heard the words "I loved and you loved and —," then they left the conservatory.

She knew she would be missed if she stayed much longer but she must see Viola at once. Mr. Joyce was standing at the entrance of the conservatory. She would get him to aid her.

"Mr. Joyce, may I trouble you for a moment? Would you bring Miss Viola Minor here? She is the one dressed in pale pink, standing near the

mantel. Tell her some one wishes to see her in the conservatory. Just leave her here. I will call you when she is ready to be taken back to the ballroom."

Joyce was a man sought after by society hostesses as a capable hand in preventing that greatest tragedy of social life, the wallflowers, and to keep such the center of an emotional vortex every minute. He was a good dancer, a good dresser, and a brilliant conversationalist. Marriage had no alluring fascination for him, unless in getting the bird he also came into possession of the golden cage. His former marriage, while not a society affair, had netted him a financial return, yet leaving an incumbrance on his hands to share in the benefit, his wife having died at the birth of their child. He had, in addition to his other accomplishments, the insolent eccentricities of some men of his stamp, for those of menial social standard. He had become enamored of the supposed young widow. Her beauty and that other gift which nature had bestowed upon her, an ephemerally imposing personality, which appealed to his masculine nature, and on this occasion he was most eager to serve her every wish or request; and she, knowing that as much depended on him as herself for the social success of the affair, did not hesitate to call him at any need for assistance.

Viola stood within the shadows of the conservatory wondering who had summoned her there. A soft touch upon her shoulder, then a familiar voice said, "It is I, Lettie. Sh — sh — don't call out my name."

She drew her to a seat near, where only a few minutes ago she and Mathews had been sitting and then she explained the situation and asked her to aid her by not disclosing her identity.

"I am puzzled over this affair. Howard never gave me an inkling of the truth. I certainly should have taken it for granted that you were here with him tonight. Now that I know your story I certainly will refuse to marry the Duke and I'll yet marry the man I love."

"I will call Mr. Joyce now, so that you will not have to leave the conservatory alone, but be sure that Howard does not see you coming out of here with Joyce."

"Howard cares too much for my welfare and my heart affairs, to misjudge me too quickly. By the way, he knows you are here?"

"Yes, he understands that I desire him to carry this thing off the best he can. We have both been placed in a desperate position here tonight. We are relying upon our tact and your help to carry it off successfully."

"You may depend upon me, cousin Lettie — Mrs. Merriman."

Viola determined to bring these two together and she asked Joyce to take her to Mr. Mathews. After escorting her across to his friend he immediately withdrew to look up the charming widow.

"Have you seen her, Howard? She is alone in the conservatory. I have been in there with her. You are to go to her."

Just as Lettie was about to pass out, the form of Howard intercepted her.

"I believe you sent for me."

"I think there has been a mistake."

"But your cousin told me you wished to see me here."

"I cannot understand her motive for such a request. I do not see why I should seek for an interview with you. I have been justified in my actions and I gave you that information in writing."

"Yes, but you did not give me the chance to explain myself or right myself in your estimation."

"On the evening I took your name in holy wedlock, I sent for you and asked an explanation in regard to the strange woman who had entered my aunt's house and who I heard in conversation with the butler, and who demanded the right of your marriage to me and accused you of a dishonorable act which no honorable man would cast upon any woman and then try to excuse it all by saying that the woman was demented."

"I offered to you the only explanation that I could. The woman is laboring under a great mistake. That is all the explanation I can give."

"You mean, you will give."

"Can or will, as you wish."

"Another thing, your marriage to me was on a financial basis, I think. I heard a conversation in which you spoke of marrying a person of unknown birth in an unkind way. Mr. Mathews, you must know that my marriage to you was a financial gain to yourself, and as to my birth, I know nothing of it, and I assure you had I known your motive —"

"Stop, Lettie! I implore you to go no further.

You do me an injustice. You regulated our relation in your note, Lettie, but you should give me time to fathom this out."

She turned and faced him. "Your own conscience cries to you the way."

"Lettie, I won't condemn you, I'm going to give you time to do a little clear thinking. If this same thing had fallen into your life as you believe did into mine, I will wish you to do your duty, I would have considered the situation."

All the courage and nerve of a womanly nature that she had kept in reserve seemed struggling to desert her.

"But you do not consider my absolute belief in you, that which I cherished, to give you all I had, myself. Now drop the subject."

"And your intentions Lettie, are —"

"To stay as I am, until I can walk proudly erect, wearing the crown of honorable wifehood, knowing that over your past hangs no cloud of dishonor."

"I married you because you were the only woman of my past, my present."

"It is time to call a stop, Howard Mathews. What about that other woman?"

He did not answer.

"When you can give me the answer and the explanation that I demand then you can come to me and claim me. Until then we are strangers. Now you can go. Please leave me."

"Just one moment, please. Answer me one question. Do they know your real name here?"

"No, I go under an assumed name."

"I supposed as much. I heard you spoken of as

a young widow here tonight. If I call, just greet me as an old acquaintance. If questioned, why, we have known each other a long time. There is no reason why we shouldn't be friends."

"You are mistaken," she said proudly. "There is no reason why we should be friends."

"Emily doesn't happen to want me."

"Emily, then, is her name?"

Howard did not answer.

"Did you ever hear of a marriage of conscience?"

"I cannot expect you to be sorry for me," he went on, in face of her doubting faith. "I don't ask it, but some time I may be able to explain. Until that hour comes, promise me that you will at least give me the benefit of the doubt."

Her candid eyes searched his face swiftly. She hesitated for a moment. Her answer was —

"Remember, I am but a private secretary. To me you are Mr. Mathews. It will help matters out for me."

"As you wish, but I shall watch over you and protect you. I have that right, you know. You are to stay here?"

"Yes, as long as they need a secretary. I think it is best to go in now. I may be missed."

"Allow me to escort you."

Her hand trembled as she laid it on his arm. As soon as he left her she went to her room. She simply could not stand the strain any longer.

A tap came on the door.

"Come in," she said.

Viola entered. "I followed you up. I wanted so to tell you that it was I who sent Howard to

you. I wanted it thoroughly understood between you. He is so noble and grand, and it was just terrible to think of both of our lives being ruined; but he is so comforting. He says we will find a way out of our difficulties; and do you know, he loves with just as great a love as I do. Why, it just draws our lives and knits them closer together. But I mustn't stay longer. I just had to tell you, but I must go down and be with him while I can. Howard says we must make the best of our opportunity. She bent and kissed Lettie. Good-bye, dear, if I don't see you again before I go. Keep up a good heart. The tangle will soon be unraveled. I know you understand."

If Viola only knew how her very words had sunk into Lettie's heart and left their wounds there. She had said that he loved as deeply as she loved. Yes, and she, Lettie, could have loved like that too, if others had not crossed her path. But duty was duty and she must close her heart. She stood in their way. She must make the way clear for them both as soon as she could. Viola had said, "I know you understand." Yes, she did understand, more than either of them even comprehended.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACCIDENT

A FEW weeks later they were all busily packing for Mrs. Whittman's annual journey to Canada, where she usually spent her summers. She had a large tract of land and one of those large roomy bungalows. Soon they were on their journey. Lettie was glad to get away to new scenes and to escape familiar faces which always added bitterness to her remembrance of the past.

Marjorie had designated their summer home as the farm, and a delightful place it was. Lettie firmly agreed with her at the first sight of the place, but it brought to her a homesickness which she could not dispel, for it made her memory return to the happy days and home in the East.

Marjorie Whittman was one of those lovable girls and to her Lettie was as much a companion as she was her mother's secretary. She came rushing into her mother's private room one bright morning and every one knew before she uttered a word that she was the bringer of good news.

"Mrs. Merriman, what do you think? Mr. Mathews is going to buy Lone Man's Ranch and is going to fit it up just as he thinks a woman would like it to be. He had Viola Minor up there to help him out and he told her he wanted her to have it

fitted out and furnished up just as he thought *she* would like it. No one was to see it until it was finished. I know it's for me. I am dying to see it. I am going to hint to him to let me see it. Mother will let you chaperon me.

"Mother, I think he has bought it for me. He has been so attentive to me, and he got the cage before he caught the bird. Won't that be just lovely?"

Her mother questions her and as she turns toward Mrs. Merriman notices a peculiar expression on her face and that her hands are clenched tightly on the desk. She puts her hand on her shoulder and as she again addresses her, looks firmly into her eyes. Lettie starts as if from a dream. She tries to speak but her lips refuse to form a word.

"Mrs. Merriman, if Marjorie has an invitation to go with Mr. Mathews, you are to accompany them. I think you understand."

She lowered her head in acknowledgment that she would do her bidding.

"Marjorie, please go up to my room and bring down my work that I am embroidering."

As Marjorie left the room the mother went over and placing her hands on Lettie's shoulders, looked into her face and said, "Do you know anything about this Mr. Mathews otherwise than that which is honorable?"

"I have not the honor of the acquaintance of Mr. Mathews' past."

"Then it is of the present, for otherwise I cannot understand your attitude when Marjorie spoke of his attentions to her."

"I could not help but notice his attentions to her of late, but there has been no more attention on his part toward her than toward Miss Minor. They have been together constantly."

"Here is your art work, Mother," called out Marjorie as she entered the room, "and, Mother, can't Mrs. Merriman chaperon me over there if he offers to take me to Canada?"

"But, Marjorie, please keep quiet a minute. Has Mr. Mathews made known to you any great friendship that you are so positive this ranch is for you?"

"Why, not exactly, Mother dear, but he has said such lovely things to me about being careful of my love affairs and — oh, pshaw! Mother, I know by his eyes that he will ask me just as soon as he gets the cage ready for the bird. It was real smart of him to think of the cage before he got the bird, wasn't it?" And away she rushed to spread the news.

Howard Mathews had bargained for the ranch. It was a beautiful place, a large house with comfortable rooms, located in the southeastern part of Canada near the St. Charles River. The estate occupied a vast tract of land and he had bought it for Lettie that she might live independently until she could secure her divorce. It was the least he could do for her and with this end in view he had seen to it that it was well stocked with life's necessities. One thing perplexed him. How to get her interested in it. The only way at present was through Viola.

Viola had gone into the work of fitting the house

up with delight, and she and Mathews were thrown into each other's company frequently. He met her at the station and they drove there together or went on horseback.

Rumor soon reached Lettie of their close intimacy and Marjorie confirmed the reports. But why hadn't he waited, at least until she had secured the divorce? He seemed anxious to be in readiness to begin life again just the moment he was free. Well, she would show him that she could and would do her part of the duty forced upon her.

They had been invited to inspect the ranch — Marjorie having paved the way. She had hinted that Mr. Joyce would go with them and Lettie resolved to keep close to him. They were to take the steam cars to Winnipeg and from there trolley to the end. Mr. Mathews and Viola met them and piloted them down to the St. Charles River, where boats were procured and they were rowed across to an Indian settlement where saddled horses were awaiting them.

Lettie continued to keep Mr. Joyce close to her side. There had passed between her and Mathews the mere courtesies which were demanded. Lettie was a fine horsewoman. It came natural to her to ride saddle-back and in Connecticut at her country home she often rode miles at a stretch.

How glorious the scenery! You could look miles over the plains. Often a little fur-coated animal would run across their path, and once a doe and her fawn ran across the field. At a turn in the road, two more horsemen joined them, friends of Howard.

The ranch was a lovely place. How much it made her think of the grand old summer home in dear old Connecticut!

Marjorie had ridden close beside Mathews all the way over and jovially referred to the fair future inmate of Lone Man's Ranch. She queried and questioned. Was she fair, blond, or brunette, hoping all the while that the description, if given, would tally with her own likeness. Mathews wisely evaded all queries.

Marjorie was in raptures over the place. Everything was just as she wanted. It could not have been more to her liking had she planned the furnishings herself, as she heartily expressed herself.

Mathews often referred Lettie to this or that and dealt expectantly in her approval or disapproval of the same.

At last he spoke to her directly. "And so you like the place? It seems to appeal to you, both the exterior and the interior."

"Yes, but it is not for me to express my approval or disapproval. The future occupant should be the one to do that," and she glanced in the direction of Viola.

"That certainly is my wish, but I am glad you also are pleased with the place."

She bit her lip to keep back the words that were in her heart; that this home should have been hers by right but she had thrown that right away.

The ride back was a pleasant one; a memory to her for years to come. Every one was jovial and

every once in a while she would catch Viola and Mathews exchanging significant glances. As they neared the edge of a rocky mountain which springs perpendicular from the edge of the Red Region, a deer suddenly bounded in front of Lettie's horse, which became frightened and bolted.

Joyce sat dumbfounded and instead of riding after her, reined his horse to a standstill. Mathews, riding behind them, saw at once that something had happened and urged his steed at full speed, but before he could catch up with the runaway, Lettie had been thrown.

The first she remembered was that something cold had struck her face and some one saying, "She lives!" She tried to rise but fell back with a groan. She had fallen down the embankment and was embedded up to her knees in the mud of the river. As she realized her position she again tried to rise.

"Lie still!" a voice commanded. "I think you are injured. We will get you safely out."

Soon Marjorie and the rest arrived. Lettie insisted, when told that her limb would have to be bandaged to prevent swelling, that Marjorie should attend to it. Marjorie soon gave up the task as every time she attempted to do the bandaging Lettie straightway fainted.

"I'll do it myself. It has to be done." And Mathews went to work and soon had it bandaged as neatly and as well as a surgeon could have done. It had been he who had taken her from the muddy riverbed and had cleaned the mud away; removed the shoe and stocking from the injured limb. How

carefully and tenderly he had lifted her and carried her to a more safe and drier spot. He sent Joyce after the doctor and Marjorie went with him to go ahead and inform her mother of the accident, and Viola went to show them the way. Then Mathews rolled his coat into a pillow which he put under her head.

"When you are better and can stand the pain I should like to remove you from the damp atmosphere of the river."

"When did you learn to be a surgeon?" was her reply.

"I belonged with a lot of the other young fellows to the Boy Scouts and that was one of the first things we were taught to do — first aid to the injured."

"You seem to have learned your lesson well," she quietly replied. Then there was intense silence for a while.

"Could you stand a little pain now, so that I could get you up to the top? It might be more convenient for the doctor. He may be an old fellow who would object to again renewing his youth by doing athletic stunts. Put your arms around my neck and hold on tight. I'll do the rest."

How big and strong he was! How gently he carried her as he ascended the high pitch, picking his way here and there to get a firm foothold! How comfy she felt with her head nestled against his strong, firm shoulder! If she could only forget that other woman.

"Now we will make you as comfortable as possible under the circumstances until the doctor comes.

Did it pain you much? I tried to be as careful as I could."

"You were very gentle. Of course it pained some, but I tried to be brave."

"You were brave, Lettie. I expected it of you; it is like you to make the best of every situation in which you find yourself placed."

Did he expect her to answer that? she pondered.

"Not always. There have been times, you know, when I have failed."

"Only when your heart and conscience has directed you otherwise."

"Yes," was her simple answer, and she did not speak again for a long time. The night shadows began to fall.

"It is getting dark," she said.

"Yes, I wonder if those idiots have lost their way? If the doctor does not come pretty soon it will be too late, for no man cares to travel these plains after dusk."

As it grew darker he began to feel anxious.

"Are you afraid to stay here a few minutes until I gather some brush or wood? It would not be safe to stay here without a fire, as the night will be chilly, I am afraid."

He did not tell her of the coyotes and wolves that would probably be prowling around for prey to appease their hunger.

He hastily gathered brush and wood, and as the dense darkness fell around them he lit the fire and telling her to try and sleep if she could, tethered his horse to a stake close by and taking the saddle for a pillow, lay watching and waiting.

She tried to sleep but the intolerable pain kept her restless. She was glad when she saw the dawn of day peeping up over the knoll. In the dim light she could see Mathews saddling his horse, and the glow of blazing logs. She saw him mount and ride away. Fear took possession of her; what if there were wild animals prowling around, and she unable to run. Then she noticed burning fagots placed here and there, standing upright in the earth, around and some distance from her. But, oh! that terrible feeling of loneliness that took possession of her, that awful desolation unbroken by a sound. She stifled the cry that came to her lips, the call for him to come back, for she must not let him know that she was dependent on him for anything.

She sat up and looked around, the woods were awakening and the light bobbed up from the edge of the plains. She wondered if he had gone for help. Sitting there waiting, wondering, she saw him return.

As he dismounted she called out, "It was horrible. Your leaving me alone."

"A necessity under the circumstances. I thought you would be glad to be relieved of my presence as in the past. I would have told you I was going but you were asleep."

She did not reply. She was listening.

He answered her questioning looks. "It's the doctor. I saw him coming and returned, afraid you would be alarmed at my absence."

"You have been very kind," she said. How she longed to ask him the truth, about the other woman. She must be brave and sit up to greet the doctor.

"Hm!" said the old physician, as he climbed out of the buckboard. "Might be a little nearer civilization. Some swelling there — pretty bad shape," as he looked her foot over.

"Broken?" she asked.

"No, only a bad wrench. Got some water?"

Mathews took a big tin from the fire from which steam was issuing. In a short time the doctor had fixed her up.

"You will be all right in five days — a week at the best," he said.

Then while she held back the expression of her pain, Mathews lifted her in his arms and carrying her to the buckboard, deposited her on the seat, and tucked the blanket around her. He threw his coat across her shoulders, found her hat, tied her discarded pony to the buckboard, and they started, he leading.

While the others didn't know she had lain all night on the plains, they supposed she was safe in some place near the Indian Reservation or that the doctor had taken her into the city for the night. Viola, keeping the others from returning, hoped that thus thrown together the two estranged ones would be united.

CHAPTER VII

THE FAMILY TREE

MRS. MINOR was almost in despair in regard Viola and the Duke. Viola refused to give the Duke a chance to propose and she told her mother, "If he ever does, I'll refuse him and in such a way that he will understand, too. What blue-blooded American girl would want that thing dangling after her and would marry him, I'd like to know."

"You don't stop to think what you would be in society across the water and how envious all our friends would be of your social standing."

"But, Mother, just think of being tied to that pike for life! Why, I'd rather go out and be independent like Lettie is."

"What do you mean about Lettie's independence? Didn't I arrange her marriage for her? And I'm thinking she will in time thank her stars that I did. She was bound to marry for love, but I soon convinced her that all this notion about love marriages was foolishness. I know how these things turn out. Didn't I marry for love? And didn't her father do the same thing, and how did it come out? Why, he didn't know a thing about his wife's birth and so far as I know those girls have not a decent drop of blood from their mother's side; all they have is

from their father's. Lettie may thank her stars that Mr. Mathews took her without looking up her ancestry. There would not many true-blooded men do it."

"And has the Duke been looking up my pedigree? Did he find any of the family tree decayed?"

"He couldn't do it, for our family tree, Miss Viola Minor, has no branches to be ashamed of."

"What about Lettie's side of it?"

"We don't know anything about that. That will never be spoken of as a part of our family tree."

"Well, so, so! I'll put my trotting skirt on, I am thinking, and scour around the country. I know Sport has been sulking ever since Lettie left home. He is lonesome and I will just take him for a good run."

"You will do nothing of the kind. What if the Duke comes? I certainly expect him."

"Entertain him. He seems to be coming to see you."

"Courting the mother for the daughter, I suppose you mean. Well, there is one thing, if you go out this afternoon and he comes, I'll lead him on to ask for your hand and I'll see that he gets it."

"Oh, if that is what he is after he can have my hand as long as he wishes, just so he doesn't get off any love speeches during that time; but as for having my heart — never!"

And upstairs Viola went, closing the door after her so as not to hear her mother's reply.

Mrs. Minor, in the meantime, had made up her mind that if Viola went out to avoid the Duke she would send the Duke after her. He would have a

chance to see her alone for once, and if he didn't propose it would be his own fault.

Viola soon appeared dressed for a jaunt, and called Sport who jumped and frolicked around, glad to have some one to go on a run with him. As she strode along through the woodland and Sport stirred up a chipmunk or partridge, her thoughts returned to what her mother had said in reference to Lettie's ancestors on her mother's side. This would be an opening for her, for surely this was where there was a decayed branch, as she expressed it, in the family tree. If the Duke knew this, perhaps it would deter him from further search for a bride in that family. She would use it as a weapon to keep him from his obnoxious and persistent attentions to her.

With flushed cheeks and radiant spirits which youth and health only can produce, she was returning when Sport gave a low growl, as he always did when some one outside of the household was near. She would not turn back. They were near the path and soon would be in sight of the house. It was probably some trespasser or some one after game. If so they would soon be aware of her presence. She would soon get rid of him, whoever he was.

"Go, Sport!" she said. "We will soon put them to rout. Go and hold him at bay like a good dog."

Sport, wagging his tail as acknowledgment that he understood, at once started from under cover and, as Viola emerged from the woods, she beheld a curious spectacle.

Sport was holding a trembling individual at bay. That individual wore a tight-fitting gray suit which

showed his thin scrawny limbs to good advantage. In one eye was stuck a glass with a cord running over his ear to hold it in place. It was the Duke and what a comical situation! She stood speechless with laughter.

"Please don't make fun, Miss Viola. Call off that brute."

Again she burst into laughter. To think of calling that little fox terrier a brute!

When she did call Sport off the Duke was almost ready to collapse. She had been tempted to go back in the woods, take a short cut to the house and leave Sport there in care of Mr. Duke; but the thought of the hard task it would impose upon Sport made her reconsider her proposed plan.

"You would better sit down, Duke. You seem a little unnerved."

"I dislike that specimen of animal anyhow, and I must confess that the sudden attack placed me at a disadvantage. Now if I had been hunting for large game, bears and wild cats, as I have often done in my hunting travels, why, I should have been on my guard; but in these tame forests of New England I did not expect even that kind of a brute to spring forward and show such animosity toward me."

"How did you wander so far into the woodland alone, your Highness? I should have thought that you would have lost your way."

She had to say something to conceal her disgust at the thought of this specimen of a man ever hunting bears. Why, he appeared at the present as though he would faint at the sight of one.

"Your mother, Miss Viola, incidentally let me know of your wandering and as she appeared anxious at your long absence, I thought I would appease her anxiety by offering to look you up. Besides, I wished very much to see you alone too, as —"

"That was just lovely of you, to offer your service in looking up her truant daughter. Do you know that once I start roaming I never know when to stop. I could go on forever. I had often wished I could travel. I know I would be a good one at it."

She knew he was going to propose and she had to ramble something to ward him off.

"That is just it, — just what you ought to do; now suppose you go back to my country with me as my wife."

"Oh, kill it — kill it! Don't let it escape!" she screamed as she jumped from her rocky seat.

He started back. "What — what is it?" he tremblingly said.

"A snake! Get a stone, a big stick!" Two feet more he added to his first record jump.

Her ruse had succeeded. If only he had gone to look for a stone or stick she could have had a chance to run for home. It might have looked disgraceful, but no more so than his conduct had been. At last she suggested their return.

"I think we have had enough excitement for one day. We had better advance to the parental roof; besides, my appetite is enormous, the air always whets my appetite up to the highest degree."

Of course, he had been asked to stay to tea and she must play the game as well as she could. She knew by the look that her mother gave her that she

was trying to fathom whether the Duke had proposed. She would make her think all was well until after he had gone, to prevent her mother's scheming to throw them together. After he had gone she certainly could stand what her mother had to say, for had she not stood this perpetual marriage question for over four months? Tomorrow she would go to Lettie's to stay until she should hear from Mathews. He promised just as soon as he got across to help her out by finding out the true standing of the Duke. She believed him a fraud, for not only did he speak such perfect English but he gave as excuse for perfect English traveling in America so long; just a mere ruse, she believed.

Next day Viola surprised her mother by announcing, "Mother, I am going to Lettie."

"With the Duke coming in an automobile?"

"He can come with it, I assure you, my going away won't prevent him, will it, considering the fact that he knows how to drive it?"

"Of all the obstinate girls you are the worst. Scrimping and saving to keep up appearances to have you marry well, to add to the dignity of our family tree, and you act just contrary to my every wish — my every plan." And Mrs. Minor sat down and cried.

"I'm sorry, Mother, to hurt you like this. Of course I want to be proud of my future, but this being thrown at a man is not to my liking."

"There you are, using the same argument that Lettie had to go over; and where is she today? Better off than she ever was, no man to hang around. Off to fields of honor for himself and probably one

of these days she will find herself the wife of one of the most talked of men in the world."

"Perhaps, but she didn't marry the ruins and remnants of misspent fortunes and what was left as a poor specimen of their race and manhood. She knew what she was getting. Hers was no bargain sale; but don't you worry over this any more. I am going to Lettie's for just a fortnight and when I come back I will either do just as you wish me to or give a very substantial reason why I cannot marry the Duke."

"You promise me this?"

"Yes, Mother, I promise to do just as I have said."

She hugged her mother, kissed away the tears, and went to get ready for Lone Man's Ranch, glad to be free from all forced attentions from the Duke.

CHAPTER VIII

HIS PLEDGE OF HONOR

THE sprained leg was getting along nicely. Mathews was eager to go to Europe and add more to his invention. His intention had been to cross the water on his honeymoon, but that was now not to be. He must see Lettie for the last time.

It was always as it had been ever since the accident, he never saw her alone. She seemed to purposely avoid him as much as possible, but was civil to him. The chance came, as he bade her goodbye, to slip a package into her hand. She looked up inquiringly into his face.

"It is the best that I could do. Accept it as my pledge of honor and duty."

He held out his hand. She hesitatingly put hers in it.

"Good-bye, Lettie, it may be our last," he said.

"Hush," she said, as she put her finger on her lip. He turned. Marjorie had just entered the room. With a nod he left the room and she afterwards knew that he had left her life for a time.

She found herself alone. She took the bulky envelope and turning it over and over again tried to fathom its contents without opening it, for she dreaded to read its contents. Why, she knew not. At last she cut the end open and was about to draw its contents from the envelope when a knock, followed by a voice, was heard at her door.

"May I come in?"

Opening the door she was greeted by the ever impulsive Viola.

"Of all things in the world! Where did you come from?"

"Just dropped down. St. Peter wouldn't have me," she added, flippantly.

"Why didn't you send word and I would have had Martin meet you. How did you get here?"

"Met Howard — oh, he knew I was coming. He gave me his buckboard to return in. Joe was driver — had to come and bid him good-bye. It is a shame you couldn't love that man; but it's made it all the better for me. I always did hunger for a man like that."

"You intend to stay?"

"If you ask me to."

"It isn't my place to ask you; it is Mrs. Whittman's. This is her home, not mine."

"But didn't Howard tell you about Lone Man's Ranch and that we were to go there and stay until I got a letter from him? Isn't he the grandest man you ever knew to do such a thing?"

"I am glad Mr. Mathews looked after your interests with such care before he left, but he isn't free yet, Viola Minor."

"Getting jealous? And yet you won't have him yourself and won't let any one else. Oh, say, if it isn't the story of the dog with a bone. Ha, ha!"

"Suppose you settle the question with Mrs. Whittman in regard to being her guest, then come to my room and we will finish our conversation."

"But I don't see what Mrs. Whittman has to

do with it. I see — it is for tonight. If she says 'yes' may I share your room, Lettie?"

"Yes, but please leave off the Lettie and add Merriman."

"So long, then, until I get through the red tape business."

While Viola goes to see Mrs. Whittman, Lettie takes her chance to open the letter. She eagerly scanned the note and looked at the large sheet. A deed and a note saying that Lone Man's Ranch was hers — not Viola's; not Marjorie's. Suddenly she hears Viola returning and hides the letter.

"Well, it is done, and there was no need of all my extra steps," spoke up Viola as she dropped into her chair. "She said that any of your friends were welcome as guests in her house. How's that, Old Particular?"

"Did you — did you mean —"

"I guess I did, did I —"

"About Lone Man's Ranch. To stay there with me?"

"I did, but you acted so ungracious about that, I think I shall return to my own."

"I didn't know a thing about it until a minute ago."

"You don't mean to tell me he didn't tell you?"

"He only left me this." And she held the note out to her.

"Am I to read it, Cousin?"

"If you wish."

Viola glanced over the contract and the note.

"Of all inconceivable things! You married to a man like that and refusing to live with him!"

"You don't stop to think of my rights; of the woman, for her words could not possibly be ignored or forgotten. If true, it naturally affected our marriage, and I have not the slightest doubt of its truth. No one would make such a statement unless it was susceptible of proof. Why, it not only involved him, it opened him to suspicions and unthinkable possibilities."

"If true, did you ever ask him for an explanation?"

"Yes, and he gave me none."

"And no reason why he held it back?"

"None at all."

"Perhaps he was holding the information in reserve in order to make the proof complete as possible."

"There might be a certain amount of logic in that, but it seems incredible that he would risk everything for mere dramatic effect and to shame me for lack of faith."

"Are you going to accept his offer of his duty toward you, as he expresses it?"

"I don't know. I must have time to think. At present I know of no other way out of my difficulties."

"It is a good thing that you are getting your senses back. It is an opportunity you cannot afford to lose. Be sensible for once. Prove that you are the honorable woman he thinks you are or he will in time prove himself far superior in his faith and virtue."

"I suspect that you have a leaning toward Howard yourself of more than mere friendship, which causes you to see no vileness in him."

"A jealous woman is something contemptible in some people's eyes. Better get that yellow streak out of your system, Cousin mine."

"I have eyes, Viola, and ears. Your own conversation to me only convinces me that Howard Mathews is a ladies' man."

"You will think differently in time, when the proof comes."

"If it does come."

"It will come. All that is necessary is time. If you don't care, I think I will prepare to retire. I could sit up here all night trying to convince you of your mistake without having that stubborn nature of yours give in one bit."

"I won't have any more conversation on the subject. I have to think."

"Five more minutes and I will be snugly in bed, then think all you wish to."

Deep in thought she heard the words, "Good-night."

"Good-night," she answered.

Before she slept that night she had read the letter over and over. He had left her Lone Man's Ranch. It was, he wrote, his right to see that she was properly cared for while she was seeking a separation. He was going across the waters to complete his invention. This would suffice as an excuse for his going alone to those friends whom he might run across on the other side. He had made every detail complete that would be essential to her comfort and maintenance.

For a few moments she sat in deep thought, then there came to her a rebellious feeling against accept-

ing any gift from Howard Mathews, even with the great longing for a home of her own, — that longing which had been continually with her of late. Then came the calmer thought. She would accept it for the sake of the woman and child of Howard Mathews' past; whether the woman's claim was honorable or not, it would provide for them a home. For their sakes she would accept the ranch. Determined to run it as a paying investment, as she sat there planning for the future, memories of that photo as she saw it that day came to her. Although it was the exact counterpart of him who had taken her in holy wedlock the profile lacked the frank, open features of the man whose name she should have borne — possibly taken when he was sowing his wild oats, as he had acknowledged the day she overheard his conversation with Joyce.

Suddenly she started from her chair and began preparations to start next day for the East to look up the deserted woman — Emily Mathews, as she called herself.

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Lettie's journey to the city had been unsuccessful in so far as inducing the woman to return with her to the ranch.

"It was as much my fault as his," the woman explained. "I insisted on being his wife. Even when he told me our marriage was illegal — a faked marriage — I clung to him. He loved you. To you he left this estate. Not to me, or mine."

She did accept Lettie's offer to support and educate the child, who was now much improved in

health and inclined to grow up a strong, healthy lad.

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The days had passed, not slowly as she had imagined they would, but swiftly, after she was settled on the ranch. Joyce and Carl Thomas had come over with Marjorie and her mother as guests for a few days and Joyce had suggested that they go down to the city to the stampede.

"I am sure Mrs. Merriman has never seen a stampede and it will be a great novelty to her."

"Quite an idea," agreed Lettie, and the next hour saw them on their way.

Rushed and jostled! How they ever got inside or ever found each other, they could not explain.

"Mrs. Merriman was tucked firmly under the wings of a big fat colored woman the last time I saw her," said Viola, "and Marjorie was trying a flying wedge act."

"I'm guessing that none of you showed your ticket," said Joyce.

"You are a nice one, Joyce, to be Mrs. Merriman's cavalier and protector, I must say," spoke up Carl.

"Didn't expect such a rush as this. It is more than a circus rush."

"Better look for seats right away, before they are all gone."

It was like a big circus ring — seats on the outside. At last they found seats that gave them a fine view of the course and where they all could be together. Most of the program was devoted to cowboy races and throwing steers and branding them. Prizes

were given to the winners of those competing. One of the interesting events was the cowgirl puncher, and the lightning activity with which they threw and branded the steer and their remarkable skill in handling their horses, or rather mustangs. The next interesting event was when the squaws raced.

"Here come the nags," said Joyce.

"What is this one?" asked Marjorie.

"Each man changes horses for the oldest and most worn pieces of horse flesh they can find. Then each man at a signal has to saddle, bridle and start off in a race with the horse given to him. Of course, each man wants his own horse, which is numbered the same as himself, to win, and tries with all his main and might to make the one he is riding get through first, for of course the last one is the winner," explained Carl Thomas.

"This is the best one yet," said Lettie as the tears of merriment rolled down her cheeks, for of all the old horses she had ever seen these beat them. One old horse, especially. The man could whip, coax, beat with his heels, do all he would the nag would not budge out of a walk — a snake walk, Joyce called it.

"Did you enjoy it?" asked Joyce.

"Enjoy it? I should say I did. I thank you for suggesting the idea. I feel I shall never forget my first stampede."

They did not try to mingle and push with the crowd in going out but held back until the larger part of the hustling crowd had passed through the gate. Lettie was eager to get to the post-office, and as each of the others had duties in different

directions they decided to break ranks for an hour and then meet again.

"I'll meet you later, for I wish to go and see if I have any mail, but will meet you here before the time limit," said Lettie.

At the office she received her letter postmarked New York. Who could it be from? Perhaps — but no; he was across the ocean. A note in a strange hand, a strange signature urging her presence at once at a hospital in New York. What could have happened? Had he returned ill? The only way to know was to go and find out the truth. As she greeted the others she appeared even gayer than usual, laughing at all their jokes. Only to one did she betray her thoughts and that was when they were crossing the river, when she was in deep thought. There seemed to be something cutting her heart strings and her conscience smote her with remorse. Only one saw her deep lines of thought — the forced gayety to the false exterior, the pallor of her face. Joyce, the man of the world, alone could see that inwardly she was troubled.

As soon as possible after reaching the ranch Lettie excused herself, offering as an excuse a headache. Joyce, standing near her, asked in a low tone what was troubling her. Taken by surprise she glanced eagerly at him, wondering how it was he should know she was in trouble and answered, "I, myself, do not know. I am as much in the dark as yourself. I only know that I have been called away. How to excuse myself and leave my guests is at present my one trouble."

"Tell them the exact facts," he said.

"How can I do that when I do not know the facts myself?"

"If you could give me some inkling, I could give them some plausible excuse for you with some resemblance of truth."

"Your request savors of unfairness to me, that you believe I am holding information from you which I could give. I assure you, I cannot give that which I do not possess. I thank you, yet I do not think you can assist me at the present time. Before I am ready to go I shall probably form a plan which will show due courtesy to my guests in explanation of my absence. I must now say good-bye. I shall return in due time."

As she passed through the doorway Joyce shrugged his shoulders. He well knew that her words were a rebuke to his inquisitiveness. Before the evening ended Thelma was sent with an excuse to the guests for the non-appearance of the hostess. Early next morning Lettie left for New York. The train seemed to fairly drag along as it had once years before. She had so often in the past wished to be free, and now the thought of it being so near, there was not that buoyancy, that joyousness that she had always thought would be hers when her freedom was granted, and her strong friendship for Joyce seemed to be waning. The evening before he had seemed a cad. He had offered to help her if she would confide her troubles, but he did not offer to help her without that knowledge. Somehow during that journey she could not compare him with Howard Mathews, for he, whom she now believed in danger, ranked far above Joyce. If only that

woman of mystery could be removed from their path. Perhaps she was about to gain that knowledge which she had waited for so long in vain.

"Dr. Roff sent for me," she said to the white-robed and capped matron.

"Doctor, a lady to see you," the matron announced as she ushered Lettie into his private room.

"Doctor Roff, I believe you sent for me. I am Lettie Armstrong Mathews."

"Yes, there is a patient who has but a few hours to live, who wished me to send for you. As there is no time to lose we will go there at once."

He hurried out and entered the elevator. At the first floor they stopped at a door and the doctor knocked. A white-capped nurse opened the door. He advanced to the bed and motioned Lettie to follow.

She gave one glance. It was Florine, but so wasted — almost to a shadow. Then the words, "Florine, sister!" fell from her trembling lips. She could not utter another word. The doctor and nurse quietly withdrew.

"Lettie, I am so glad you came. I sent for you, take her and love her for my sake. You will find letters in the desk in the room where I lodged." She was speaking with difficulty now. "It is — with — out — sin. John mar —" Her head fell back, her hand that held Lettie's relaxed.

"Florine, Florine, my sister!" she cried.

The doctor heard her and came hurriedly to the bedside, and glancing at the patient nodded his head to the nurse.

Lettie grasped his arm. "Where is it?" she asked. "Is it a child?"

"It is a little girl and she wished it given to you. Are you her sister?"

Its name was Nettie. There was no other name. Florine had given the doctor or nurse no information. Lettie brought it home to the ranch. No one knew from whence it came and it brought to Lettie all the love of motherhood.

Viola had left for home during the absence of Lettie and she had left a note to the effect that her mother was ill and needed her.

On the dressing table lay an envelope addressed in a handwriting which seemed to be familiar to Lettie. She scanned it closely. There was no mistake — it was Mathews' handwriting and this was what Viola probably had been waiting for. For a long time she sat thinking. She had two to look after now. She would go home and look thoroughly through all her father's personal things. He must have left something more than personal estate for her and Florine. She must find out for the sake of this little piece of humanity as well as for her own.

CHAPTER IX

HER FATHER'S PAST

IT seemed as though there were a dozen hands helping her out of the carriage and Viola insisted on having the bundle which Lettie held close in her arms, which looked, to Viola, more like a huge bundle of clothing than anything else. As the wrapping was removed from the precious bundle, all gasped with amazement to find, not a babe of a few weeks, but a child of four years.

"This can't be yours. Why, you've exchanged with some one else."

"No, that is the young hopeful. You see the marriage was kept secret until he —" Then she stopped abruptly. They didn't know about the child's birth; she had not written them.

"I couldn't explain on a card very well. It's Florine's baby."

"Florine's baby? Have you gone daffy?"

"No, but I almost thought I was fit for the retreat when I had this fall to my lot, and I didn't know how to look after an infant. I put straight for home, waiting to offer an explanation when I got here, and that I intend to do as soon as I can relieve myself of the accumulated dust and dirt under which my person has almost been hidden during my miles of travel."

"Dearie, come right upstairs. You must think we have forgotten whatever manners we ever had; but seeing such a large child when we expected to see a mere infant, your own, Lettie, did upset us. Here is your old room. Can you get along alone or shall Marie or Viola help you?"

"I can attend to myself, Aunt Fanny, but would you attend to that child? I don't know how things are put on, but I did the best I could."

"I will look after her myself," said Aunt Fanny, "but don't be long changing, for I must hear the full particulars."

Before Lettie was fully dressed Aunt Fanny was at the door with the little one, who had been shedding tears of fear, and Viola had come up to the room also.

"I think, now that we are all here, I will tell my story," said Lettie.

She told it to them just as it had happened.

"But didn't you find the letters to tell you who he was?" interposed Viola.

"I went to the rooms where she had lodged and the landlady had sold the desk to a second-hand dealer. After a great deal of trouble I finally located him, but he didn't know where it was. He had sold it to a man who wanted it because it was an antique. Of course, he didn't know the customer and I have not to this day heard anything of it. I left my address, both with this dealer and the landlady, so that in case the child's father should return or any written matter received, that I could be informed. I am leaving it in God's hand. In time I think this mystery will be unraveled, as I hope my birth

will be, and that is one reason why I am here; not only to learn to be a mother to my little sister's motherless child, but also to look through my father's belongings to see if in any way I can come across even a link or one piece of evidence to show who my mother was. Perhaps, Aunt Fanny, you could help me with that information if you chose."

"I didn't bother with trying to find out anything concerning your father's marriage. It was distasteful to me and I just dropped correspondence with him when I found that he had married a gypsy girl. I would not have anything to do with him after that, but your Aunt Anna stood up for him and was always praising your mother and telling how hard she tried to learn and make up for her ignorant girlhood. Your father had made a lot of money, or rather gold nuggets which he turned into money, and built this lovely place. Your mother died, they said, when Florine was born, but I rather think that she died of a broken heart caused by the snobbishness of your father's friends and I think he tired of his wild gypsy bride after a short time."

"Is that all?"

"I should think that was enough. It gives me a creepy feeling to rake up this dishonorable marriage, the only dishonorable branch of the family tree of all these years, and now here comes another mystery in the family." Aunt Fanny heaved a sigh.

"Mrs. Minor, tea is ready. You told me to get it ready early, as Mrs. Mathews was here," said Marie as she appeared at the door. "My Mistress Lettie! when did you come home?"

"Just got here about an hour ago, and see what I brought with me," as she pointed to little Nettie, who lay asleep in her arms.

"Oh, the darling! But she's a big baby I should say, and sure you're the Mrs. Mathews. I am so glad everything came out all right after all, Miss Lettie."

Lettie was obliged to wait until next day before she began her search, although she was eager to begin it right after luncheon that very day, but the fatigue of the journey and the extra care of the little one had completely tired her out.

The next morning, as daylight was creeping into the room, she got up and dressed for she was eager to get to the task of going through her father's belongings if such could be located. Her search in the attic revealed no information or anything of importance in regard to her father's past life. She thought of the lodge and of the loft. Perhaps she might find something belonging to her father there. She got Marie to get a ladder and put it up for her. Climbing the ladder she lifted the board which covered the opening and, peering within, saw several boxes. She was sure that some one of them contained some of her father's personal belongings. One by one she brought to the light but nothing to give her enlightenment on the subject was found. Finally she opened a tin box built like a miniature trunk. In that she found letters addressed to her Aunt Anna. She brought the box down with her and in looking them over, one letter caught her attention. At last a link!

Dear Anna:

I thought it best to write and tell you of the situation here at present. It is getting desperate here. Men act like demons over gold. I have cleaned up quite a little and as we are all taking our chances or our lives in our hands I think it best to tell you that if anything should happen to hurry me to David's locker before I get to see my wee little lambs, you look up my hunting jacket where you will find a little book which I always carry in the inside pocket and which tells you how many gold nuggets I have cleared and where to find the money. I have exchanged some but I hope to clear up enough before many days to be home with a lump that will keep the wolf away from the door as long as any of us last.

I have tried to find some inkling of Ophelia's birth. Old Dingo wears a chain around his neck which has a ring attached which I am sure belonged to her, and it seems to have a crest engraved on it. Old Dingo watches me like a mouse. I hope to fathom this thing before I return.

Be good to the wee little lassies. Do not think I intend to come home in an ambulance wagon, but there are desperate characters creeping into camp and life is held dear here.

Your brother,

Kiss the wee bairns for me. Will.

And still another letter. At last she had stumbled upon the truth of her mother's birth, for by the date the letter bore it must have been long before she herself had been born.

Dear Sister Anna:

You are perhaps wondering where I am. Well, I've had quite an experience and through it I found a woman

to whom I have given all the romantic love of this wild roaming hulk of humanity. I was prospecting along the Johnson River in company with ten others during the noonday. I took my gun and wandered into "Bush" in search of wild turkey. I startled one which promptly scurried into a thicket of sting trees. Intent upon getting a shot, I plunged in after the bird and was well into the middle of the "torture chamber" before I realized its nature. I forgot the turkey in the extreme torture of the moment. When I reached camp I was literally on fire and, in my ignorance, applied water to my hands and face. That so aggravated the pain that for some hours my companions feared I would go mad. We applied what rude remedy our outfit supplied but to no benefit, so one of my companions went down to a gypsy encampment some miles below and a young woman accompanied him back. She was a young woman just entering her twenties and seemed to know what to do. Nature, it seems, has provided an antidote for the sting of this tree in the form of a plant called the congeetar. It is usually found in the immediate vicinity of this tree and the young woman got some of this plant and rubbed it briskly over the parts affected and that allayed the pain to a great extent.

Well, that woman was a jewel. I got friendly with her and I am convinced that she is not a gypsy by birth. She told me that the old gypsy queen has a tiny ring hung around her neck which she believes belongs to her past, for the dreams are always with her and she cannot drive them from her mind. Her skin, I think, has been darkened and her hair colored, for underneath, near the nape of the neck, tiny little ringlets of golden hair are seen. She is afraid of being seen talking to me and it is only by secret that I see her. She seems gifted in the English language and also knows how to write a very neat hand. I learned to love her and as soon as I have

found gold enough to make me well off, I shall leave and take her with me. She feels anxious to leave and make more of herself which is impossible in her present environment.

You have to be on your guard here for men are like demons — gold-crazed, and no man's life is worth anything that stands in the way. I am trying hard to get enough to get out and take her, the little bird of paradise, with me. With best of love,

Your brother, Will.

The journey had been one of luck, one of pleasure. Aunt Fanny had taught her the knowledge of motherhood and she had graduated with high honors, as she expressed it. The fireplace had of late often contained a fire, as the evenings were cool. There had been clambakes and other bakes, such as corn and chicken and fish, in the woods at the old stone fireplace. Lettie disliked to go there, and it was only the sociability of the affair that tempted her to go, for she tried in every way to avoid the place because it brought unhappy memories and it gave her that creepy feeling as though the gypsy queen was still there about to tell her that future over again, but it was one of the most delightful places in all New England and it made one think of those historical tales of English estates where reserves were stocked with all kinds of game for the benefit and gratification of sport for its guests.

The autumn leaves were falling. She must soon return to the ranch, for the harvesting time was near. How she longed to take Viola back with her or even Aunt Fanny, that the ranch that should have been theirs should already be shared by them; but

Viola was going abroad with Marjorie and her mother.

Viola declared that just as soon as she returned she would come to the ranch. Aunt Fanny said the winter was dreary enough without spending it on a ranch miles away from every one. "The city for me," she said.

The woods were beautiful. The trees garbed in their autumn robes of beautiful hues made Lettie long to go once more on a hunt, for the woods must be full of game now, if it had not been disturbed all these last years.

"Viola," she called. Then sang these words,

"Put on your old gray gown,
With the game-bag on it,
While I hitch the cartridge bag to my shape.
Through the woodland gay
While we hunt the squirrel gray
On this glorious autumn day."

"It's a go," cried Viola.

A little later they were ready and with laughter strode away toward the woodland. Luck soon followed them and in a few hours their game-bag was full. On their way home Lettie in her conversation spoke casually of Viola's return and the cause of that letter. Viola explained the contents of the letter in such a way as to cause Lettie to think that Mathews still wished the way cleared for himself and Viola. There surely was a deeper link than friendship between these two. Again the thought came that she was the barrier between them. She

was silent the rest of the way home, while Viola concluded that Lettie had one of her moods again.

What was Aunt Fanny's surprise to see them return at sunset laden with the results of their hunt.

"Lettie did the best ever. Why, you ought to have seen her pop over that saucy big gray squirrel. He was that tantalizing that he would act as though he were inviting us to take a shot at him. Lettie stood ready and at a certain moment she fired just the one shot and he tumbled down. He's a beauty, too."

"I am going to skin him and carry that fur home with me as a trophy of my hunt," said Lettie.

"And the partridge! Why, Mother, that partridge gave us the run of our lives. We fired three times before we got his goat. The quail are the cute ones, for they will keep to the ground and hide under the leaves. You don't get a chance at them as you do when they are in the trees or air. Lettie is a grand sportsman and I have learned more than one lesson today. But, Mother, I am as hungry as a bear, if you know what kind of hunger that is."

"I am sure I do not."

"Well, the definition is that your stomach tries to double up so as to reach your throat."

"Well, you just hold it down for five minutes until I can reach the pantry and return."

After Lettie's return the days sped along almost too rapidly, but as the beautiful days gave way to the cold winter months, the days dragged along less rapidly. She almost longed to be with Viola on her trip to that "beautiful other world" as she

called the country across the water. If she was only wealthy she could go as her fancy dictated, but she was chained down to the hospitality of a man whose name she did not bear before the world. But could she be free to go? What of that little waif that knew her only as mother? She could not desert her. As the days sped by, she was more than ever convinced that her duty was to free Howard Mathews. While one little voice whispered to her to do her duty, the other said, "What God has joined let no man put asunder"; but at last the thought of his silence and no explanation in regard to that other woman caused Lettie to make up her mind — to secure a divorce.

CHAPTER X

THE REJECTED LOVE

LETTIE was determined to secure a divorce and on this particular day had seated herself on the cool, shady side of the veranda, trying to concentrate her mind on this one subject, but she was in a peculiar frame of mind, gliding off from one thing to another. She had just made up her mind to ask Joyce, the very next time she should chance to meet him, his views in regard to the proper method she should pursue, when she heard an automobile stop at the gate. She had been expecting no one, so possibly it was some one from some of the other ranches who had come to see Martin.

"Mrs. Merriman, are you good for a ride this morning?" called the merry voice of Joyce, as he strolled to where she was and flung himself into an easy chair, "or are you so inspired with this lovely, cool place that you dread to venture out into the hot sun?"

"Just in time and thought, Joyce, I want to go to town."

"Come on then," he called out, and hustled her toward the auto, not heeding her protests.

Away they whirled. It was a beautiful day and Joyce resolved at once to take this chance to ask

the young widow for her heart and hand. They were at the bend of the road and the auto slackened its speed. He seized her hand. "I've waited long for this moment, Mrs. Merriman. I have loved you from the first."

"I am sorry, Mr. Joyce, you have spoken to me on the subject, for I cannot reciprocate. I accepted your invitation today to get to town that I might have the mystery which binds my life unraveled, and until that has been done I cannot even think of your proposition."

"I care not what mystery shrouds your life; I am willing to take you as you are." And he poured out words of love passionate in their intensity. He drew her to him and tried to kiss her.

"How dare you!" she cried. "Let me go the rest of the way alone." She tried to get out but he held her back.

"You had better go the rest of the way to town with me now and then if you decide not to go back with me, why, just as you choose, dear."

He was bitter now, and that look of insolence and impertinence showed plainly on his face, and in a few minutes he was driving recklessly. At a turn in the road he met a team and to avoid a collision he struck a boulder, and the car skidded and turned turtle. Lettie was thrown into the road but escaped serious injury, sustaining just a few bruises. Joyce, however, was pinned under the car unconscious from a gash in his head. With the assistance of the occupants of the team he was removed from his perilous position and taken to the Inn a few rods up the road. Lettie stayed there until the doctor

had arrived and everything possible had been done for the injured man.

Lettie in the meantime tried to plan out things, but she felt so bitter toward Joyce for his unmanly conduct that she found it impossible to concentrate her thoughts. Her mind seemed dazed. She quietly left the room. Once outside she removed from her garments all tell-tale marks of the accident. How good the air felt, it quieted her bewildered brain. On she walked she cared not where only to be alone to think, to collect her thoughts. As she neared the village she came to a little church by the roadside; as she drew closer she perceived the door stood ajar. Drawn by an unresistible force she entered. Inside the vestibule she halted as she heard childish voices singing. Plainly the words floated to her, "Oh the wrong that may be righted as the days go passing by," and then the words, "Oh the good that we may do as the days go passing by." The words seemed to have some significance. Repentance came to her of her bitterness toward Joyce; he had done nothing more than any other man would have done under the same circumstances. She would return and as soon as possible acknowledge the injustice she had done him. Slowly she retraced her steps.

"How is he?" she asked of a tall slender man, who had just come from the room she had so quietly slipped from some time before with a feeling of animosity towards the unconscious occupant, that feeling which had so suddenly turned to sympathy and pity.

"He appears much better. Are you his wife?"

"No, only a friend, to whom he proffered a ride. I was with him at the time of the accident. My escape from injury was a miracle."

"I see, I congratulate you on your escape, God was your protector."

"I presume by your words and attire you are a minister of the gospel. I have just returned, myself, from the church over there."

"There is no better place to seek shelter than God's Sanctuary, it shields all alike from sin."

"It was not from sin but rather duty I was hiding, the words I heard there sent me back to what was an unwilling duty."

"Unwilling duties while unpleasant to perform have their reward. While the plain duties often escape our notice, we are always conscious of the unpleasant ones."

"Then divorce is a duty when it rights a wrong done another."

"But you cannot call divorce a duty. It is in itself an evil to society. There is no authority in God's Book for such an action."

"Not even when it is used as Justice to save from ruin two lives?"

He looked at her in amazement. "The Bible teaches and shows you the laws of marriage. Divorce is the law of a low generation of people. Good-day."

Lettie turned and entered the room, she bent over Joyce. He was asleep. Her lips uttered her thoughts, "Oh the good that we may do and the wrong that may be righted as the days go passing by," while her heart cried out, "Turn backward, oh

time, in your flight. Give me a child's faith, just for tonight."

That night she had a dream. She seemed to be in purgatory; she saw forms there that were familiar to her and others kept coming; some stayed, others went farther on down to Hades. She heard the guard address her, he had told her that she could go to earth again. "For, whatsoever thou hast done thou didst unintentionally." And she felt herself once more on earth, how she came she did not know. The dream, combined with the minister's words, left a deep impression upon her heart and mind. It was the turn of the tide and she found the real meaning of the words, "The good that we might do as the days go passing by."

CHAPTER XI

A CLUE THOUGH SLIGHT

IN a shop on the coast of England an inventor was hard at work on a new style aeroplane, only the few workmen to help him were allowed near the place. The inventor had won fame and honor on one invention, still he worked harder on a new invention for the English government. The evening shadows were falling and he sat thinking. His thoughts were of one far away across the ocean and that which had parted them, the shattered fragments of one woman's life in which he had played a part.

"Hallo, old man, what's the diff? New invention pan out all wrong?" Mathews looked up as Conrad held up to view a small white envelope, a contrast to the large bulky ones which he had been accustomed to receive. His heart gave a leap as he held out his hand to receive it. Could she have written? No — it could not be, for she had said she never would come to him. It was probably from Viola; but no, the postmark belied that.

Slowly he opened it, and then, after he had read it let it fall unheeded at his feet. In that letter was revealed to him for the first time the mystery of that other woman, the gulf that separated this woman and the one woman in the world from his

protecting love. He would prove to her that he was not the beast that she thought he was. But what proof had he? Only those words in his Aunt's letter: "Your brother has been visiting us; he is an exact counterpart of yourself, a true Mathews. Queer, in all these years we believed him dead, he should at last have sought us out."

His twin brother, whom he had not the faintest recollection of ever having seen since they were left orphans. The Woman of Mystery — a clue on which to work, slight as it was. The words, "He is a counterpart of yourself," kept ringing in his ears.

Mathews had not heard from home in months; he had kept away from London and the Wayfarer's Club, where he knew Americans generally congregated, for fear he might run across familiar faces. If he did not see his friends and acquaintances there would be no fear of questions to be answered. At last his longing for home and friends became irresistible. He soon was on his way to the club which before he had strenuously avoided.

He had hardly entered the club when he was greeted with, "Hallo, Mathews, old fellow, congratulations, heard of the honor you had achieved with your inventions, saw by the paper you had made a name for yourself, but we expected it of you," greeted Guy Anderson. "Too bad it's a girl, Howard, a boy might have followed in his father's footsteps."

"A girl — I didn't hear —"

"Then it's a lone hand; it was a girl. I saw your wife in Connecticut and she had the little one with her and it was a girl."

"See you later, Anderson, I have an important

engagement," was all he could offer as an excuse to get away until he could collect himself and face the situation, mistake or truth, whichever it was. He made his exit only to run across another acquaintance, "Hallo, Mathews, what's your hurry? When did you drop in?"

"Glad to see you, Johnson."

"Just came over, first time in two years. I see that you have been doing honor to yourself. Glad of it. I suppose you were glad it was a boy, have to congratulate you even at this late hour. I expect you are on your way home to join the family. Heard it did not favor you any, clear mother."

"Excuse me, Johnson, I have an engagement; see you later." And off he rushed, anywhere to get away. Anderson had said it was a girl and Johnson a boy. There must be a child, she must have secured her divorce and married. Who? Why, Joyce! She had been on Mathews' mind constantly of late. His friends could not have known of the second marriage, that was certain, or was it all a joke? Had he to mope around until he could find out for sure? He could face the situation as he found it, until he was sure of the facts. If he began running away from his friends to avoid facts he would be kept busy. As he started back he was greeted by, "Hallo, Howard, you're a lucky chap, I must say. Every one praising you; Miss Minor came over on the same boat with us, with Mrs. Whittman and daughter. She was all talk of the little ones and your beautiful wife. She tells me that motherhood has only added to the beauty of her cousin."

"Say, Thomas, for heaven's sake, is it a boy or a girl?"

"Honest Injun, have you fallen off the water wagon or have you been on a spree for the last two years? A boy or a girl? Why, man alive, it's both, twins, two of the handsomest kids you ever set eyes on, and you would know in a minute they belonged to her. Say, Howard, take my advice, climb back onto that water wagon again and go home to your family."

"Say, Thomas, I believe you are right, I have been drunk or luny. I'm going home just as soon as I can arrange my affairs and I shall see for myself."

As he wended his way back to the place that had been home to him for the past two years, memories of her to whom he had given his name and all the love of his manhood passed before him. The beautiful home in old Connecticut overlooking that beautiful lake — Whitemere, meaning white lake — where he had wooed and won her, even when in her frank, honorable way she had confessed she did not know the true meaning of love but, as his wife, would strive to learn its true value. And then that mystery that had parted them, and the child that they — his friends — had knowledge of was possibly that of the woman who had called herself Emily Mathews and she — Lettie — had taken that child believing that through its veins ran the same blood as that of his own, and this woman either an impostor or laboring under some mistake. Well, he must see for himself; it would be the better way — unless she had secured her decree and married Joyce, which seemed impossible. Strange Viola

Minor had never written, not even answered his missives. His invention was perfected, the trial a success. He was free to go and solve the facts of the situation himself and that he intended doing as soon as he could settle his affairs.

CHAPTER XII

THE COUNTERPART

IN a clubroom in London sat a half dozen men discussing the latest news, when the first edition of the evening paper was thrust towards them and the call of the newsboys was heard.

"Latest news of war! Latest inventor of air ship! Trial a success!" Eager hands reached out for the paper. One of the number, glancing at the print photo of the inventor, gave an exclamation of surprise, jumped to his feet, and extending his hands, said, "Shake hands, old fellow, didn't know we had a genius in our midst."

Harold Mathews stared in amazement. "What's the joke, any way? You've got my goat for fair."

"No squealing! It's your photo all right, and your name," and he held up the print to view. "No bluffing out of it."

Again he tried to deny it, then he closed his lips tight, for surely the features in that print were his, or the exact counterpart of himself, and let the honor be his for a while. His comrades saluted him, and bowed to him, and shook him by the hand, and then the toasts were drunk. Soon as he could he left his merry companions. And that night in his room alone, he found a plan. He was in need of hundreds of dollars to get him out of debt and

put him on his feet again. Here was the chance; to steal the plans of that inventor and, for a large sum, supply it to another nation. Late he sat up that night perfecting his plans.

The Duke, yes, he was the man, for he was always hanging around the club, always dead-broke, more or less. Tomorrow he would see him and with his assistance complete his plans.

The next day found him seated in the clubroom in deep conversation with the Duke. "You see, I'd make some money by selling to the English government, but I can make my fortune by selling to the German government, that is, if I can make the sale without the others gaining the information and facts now. Here, waiter, bring us another bottle. You see, all you have to do is to go with me, and whatever I say goes. You have only to stick to me."

"I see, but if you get caught, do I get part of that dose, too?"

"Not on your life, you have done nothing, you're the innocent, you can play at it all right, just put it over them, freeze them out. I will have to pay the toll, but don't worry, I'll get there. You meet me at the club tomorrow, I've got to find out more about this man's movements, I should have said, the men's movements."

"Wait a moment, Sir Mathews, how about this foreign lingo, do you know it?"

"Like a book, any way I can get through, I'm not supposed to be a real one, you know."

"Not at all, but I was wondering if you knew it enough to talk business, so's we'd not have to

have a third party — less to be divided, in that case."

"Don't you worry, it's you and I divide. So long — don't forget, '*Gleich und gleich gesellt sich gern.*'"

But he murmured as he threshed his way along out of the club, "I'll see Mr. Mathews get his big, his handsome." Wending his way toward the seaport, he found the seafaring men, who showed him where and how he could find the shop, where the navigators for the government were working to get the best results on aeroplanes and zeppelins as to be practicable for use in war.

It was just striking ten when the conspirator came in sight of the navigation shop. If he didn't fail when the time came! Here within his reach was that which meant to him hundreds. He needed the money it would bring. Cautiously he neared the place, keeping within the shadow of the trees that flourished along the pathway. He must not be seen by that other one — his counterpart. He must so familiarize himself with the place and its surroundings that the employees would not mistrust him. In a short time he had memorized every little detail in regard to the place and wended his way back toward the city to meet his appointment with the Duke.

"Already here, I see," he greeted the Duke as he entered the clubroom. "Glad you're so punctual, Duke, as I am eager to arrange our little bit of business, as this very afternoon the other gent is for leaving the country."

Carefully he laid his plans, but never once mentioned the fact that the other gentleman was his

double, for his intentions were that when the other man left the plant the Duke would believe it was he himself.

"You stay, Duke, where I tell you to and when you see me leave the plant, just you come across by the other way. Mind you, don't come the same way I do. When you catch sight of me, wait in hiding behind the trees until I whistle, 'It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary,' then come on, but don't stir a foot until you hear me whistle the tune."

At three that afteroon a figure stood behind a tree far enough from the navigation plant so as not to be seen. Out of the building emerged another figure of a man who stood looking toward the building. Then two more came forth, one of whom seemed to be bidding the others Godspeed. One was the familiar figure of our hero, the world-known famous navigator; the other, his friend and confidant, Conrad White. A few rods from the plant they turned, looked back and waved their hands. Then from behind the tree came forth another Howard Mathews. He walked around the building until he struck the main path that the other two men had taken. Then he walked back into the building which had before been so carefully guarded from all comers. John Holt, the foreman, glanced up.

"Anything wrong, Mathews, or forgotten?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot some important papers in my drawer, but I think I must have given my keys to Joe; I don't seem to have them with me."

"You mean you gave them to Conrad. I don't think you will need them, Mathews, for your desk

was not locked up when you left and I think it was cleaned of everything."

"We'll look, anyway." And he walked over to the desk. Empty of everything he found it.

"Better look in the safe," said Holt.

No key to the combination! What a fix! He must get the man Holt to open it. Instantly he had formed a plan.

"Look for me," he said. "Will you? I have thought of another place in which I might have placed it and I am in such a deuced hurry."

Holt started, then hesitated.

"I don't think you ever gave me the combination to it. I believe that lay between you and Conrad."

"So, so. Well, go on with what you were doing. I'll see to the safe myself."

Holt was perplexed. He had never heard Mathews speak in that way before, for he always was courteous to all his help. Something must have gone wrong with the man. With this thought he turned and resumed his task. The conspirator was in a fix as to how to get this safe open. He must feign at doing so. At his first trial the door came open. What luck! But not a thing was in it of any value. Balked in his efforts he made up his mind to find out what he could from the man Holt. Taking his watch out he uttered an exclamation, then said, "Pretty deuced luck, I must say. Delayed myself — too late to meet Conrad." Good! He had remembered the name.

"But you had better book your berth as soon as possible or you'll get left. They're pretty scarce at this time of the year," said Holt.

"That's so, but isn't there another going out soon?"

"Yes, but that may be going to New York direct. You can get into Canada from there, although it is a longer, roundabout way."

"Well, if I get left on one boat, I'll take the other."

So the inventor was going to Canada and he had with him the plans of his invention! Luck had favored him; he had played his game well. Now to follow him would be his next step.

"Well, so long, old man," he said to Holt.

"Good-bye, Mathews. I'll come just as soon as the government lets me off and join you."

"Good! Let us know as soon as you decide."

With that he left the plant. He had forgotten all about the whistle for the Duke, who had been waiting for him. As the thought came to him he began to whistle the tune. From out behind the tree came the Duke. Mathews laughed.

"I forgot all about you. You see I didn't really need you, only in case the government people became suspicious. Then I'd need you to corroborate my statements. Gad, what luck! Not a paper had he left. They took the original, but, by Gad, I'll get them and copy them. I'll keep the original and give the English government the copied ones."

"I'm on, but how'll you do it?"

"Oh, somehow. Where there's a will, there's a way. By Jove, I've got it. You go down and watch him, — I mean watch me and see where I buy my ticket to and then you buy one. Here's the money. Keep your eyes and ears open, but don't recognize

me. I'll leave you now, but you look for me at the ship office, — booking the office. Remember."

Duke unsuspectingly followed the real inventor and, watching when he bought his ticket, bought one for himself, following the man into the boat. At the cry "All aboard!" a man came hurrying up the gangplank. Duke, standing by the railing, his mind occupied by watchful attention to Mathews, was accosted by a stranger. As the inventor turned to walk away, Duke started to follow him. The stranger touched his arm.

"Better stay with me, Chap," he said.

Duke looked at him in scorn. The stranger lifted his disguise.

"It's me, your pal. That other fellow you have been following is my double. I didn't tell you before for fear it would give the game away. The fellow what's got the design I'm after. My name hereafter is James Merrill. That's my almost forgotten ancestor's name. Thanks to my timely remembrance, it is thus recorded at the purser's office as lessor of rooms A and B to which we will adjourn as soon as possible, for the first thing we want to do is to form plans to get hold of those designs and duplicate them before they penetrate this disguise of mine."

"But if they should miss the designs," interposed the Duke, "and search the ship, and if they penetrated your disguise and see the likeness to the other swell, it's all up with the game."

"That's just what I intend to avoid. I mean to get in by a pass-key, get the designs and copy them; put back the duplicates and, in the meantime, keep

the real ones. It's a sure thing, for we are an exact likeness and the government cannot tell which from t'other; and if the storm does burst, depend on me. I'll be far out of harm's way."

"All's to the good so far, but what's your game?" asked the Duke.

"First to get an imprint of that key. Say, Duke, suppose you keep a good lookout and when he is locking his door, accidently jolt his key out of his hand and in giving it to him exchange keys with him. By the time he notices the diff I'll have an imprint of the same. Then I'll take my time to get those plans."

"If that's my part, it's dead easy, sure."

"Oh, I'll not let you off on that. You've got to keep him off the track while I'm searching his room and also keep him until I can copy them."

"It's a go. Just give me the signal. When I am to go ahead, I'll be on."

Hardly a day out when Duke, apparently without his sea legs on, rolled against Mathews as he was locking his stateroom door and, as luck would have it, his key was knocked from his hands. Duke, with composure and in a gentlemanly way, picked up the keys and apologizing, returned to him the false keys and then keeping up the conversation in regard to its being his first voyage and the awful feeling he experienced within his interior and his desire to get out on the deck, he had in the meantime contrived to slip to his pal, whom he now called James, the keys of No. 6. Duke was a very interesting converser and, as he claimed conversation kept him from thinking of a commotion within

caused by the rolling of the ship and as he expressed a desire to remain on deck until the impulse to empty all within him in the sea had subsided, Mathews kindly consented to stay with him, and so for two hours or more they sat there until summoned below for the principal repast of the day.

James Merrill, as we now know him, did not appear and Duke knew by that he had not accomplished his purpose as yet. Dinner over, and lighting their cigars, Mathews suggested that he was going to his stateroom. Duke was about to make some excuse to prolong his stay on deck when he was relieved to see Merrill on the other side. So bidding Mathews good-day, he stated his desire of also adjourning to his stateroom. After Mathews left him, Duke crossed over to Merrill.

"Have you got it?" he queried.

"Sure, and all drawn out. But I've got to get it back again. I came out to see how clear the coast was."

"By Jove! how is the man to get in with the false key?"

"That's the time I act, when he comes to see if there hasn't been a mistake made."

"Suppose he doesn't come, but calls the steward?"

"That's your cue. Go to him before he gets the steward and tell him you can't get in. Match up your keys, but be sure and hold him until I can get into his room. In the meantime, I'll open it and you pretend to go to our stateroom to get the right key. I'll be there or near there with them."

"Gee! this is pretty hot work! Getting near the danger mark!"

"Getting cold feet, are you?" sneeringly remarked Merrill.

"Not a bit of it. Just to my liking. The game has been too dead easy thus far. Here comes our man now."

"Get him before he sees the steward." With these words Merrill quickly disappeared.

Duke greeted Mathews with, "Just looking for the steward."

"Can't make this key open my stateroom," suavely spoke Duke.

"That is just the man I'm after. Same case here. Can't understand it."

"I can't make out," said Duke looking at his key, "why it won't work. Gee, no wonder! No. 6 is marked on the key and mine is A."

"And mine is marked A. My room is No. 6," replied Mathews.

Then they stared at each other. Finally Duke broke into laughter. (If Mathews had taken notice he would have seen it was rather of a stage laugh than otherwise.)

"Why," he said, "we must have changed keys when I was off my sea legs. I was too seasick at that time to notice anything in particular. I'm yours for a drink on that. Come on down to the bar."

"No, thanks, I do not care for any drink," Mathews replied.

His manner put Duke on his guard. Perhaps he was a little skeptical.

"Then you do not accept my apology?" asked Duke.

"Much to the contrary. I was only refusing the treat — not as coming from you, but rather because I do not as a rule, indulge."

Duke felt much relieved and casting his eyes toward the other side saw his partner standing there and knew the coast was clear. That night was the last meeting between Mathews and the Duke. In a few days they landed in Canada, prepared to return and sell their ill-gotten designs.

While waiting eagerly to secure passage to return to London, and from there to make their way to Germany, mingling among a group, Harold gains information which leads him to seek out a naval attaché and, through him, to sell the design or duplicate for as high a price as the government would offer him.

CHAPTER XIII

IN HIS CRUCIAL HOUR

LETTIE had often suffered great remorse that some knowledge of the truth in regard to the woman whose appearance on that fatal day had never been revealed to her, for the secret, if any, had been kept by Mathews, and time in no way had cleared the matter up. Deep in one of her meditative moods she had unconsciously walked into Viola's room without the usual courtesy of knocking and she certainly felt relieved when she found no occupant there. Noticing a paper lying on a dresser, she picked it up. On the folded page she noticed the name "Mathews." The item attracted her attention.

> New York, Sept. 28th. — Papers and designs pertaining to the invention of Howard Mathews and sold to the government have been found false duplicates. Mathews is being held under bonds.

Howard Mathews, whom she had mourned as dead! Not only a man of convenient marriages, but a spy. A man of dishonorable principle. Better were he dead than this dishonorable stain upon his name. Then the thought came to her, what if he had done this for her, to keep her in comfort? Moving her hands mechanically on the table, her fingers came in contact with a scrap of paper. She uncon-

sciously looked at it, still deep in her own thought. Instantly she recognized Viola's handwriting addressed to Mathews. She reads what! That Viola has written to the authorities trying to intercede for him, and she mentally condemns Viola. Why should Viola be so blind as to stand up for such an unprincipled man as this, and this man who had made her his wife? He with the open, frank face of an innocent child who had defiled her love. Burying her face in her hands she broke into sobs, saying over and over to herself: "Why is there still faith in my soul for such a man?" Then she grew calmer, thinking how and with what faith Viola had stood by and tried with her womanly heart to help him out while she had only condemned him. She reached for the newspaper and below the first item she found another:

LIBERTY FOR HOWARD MATHEWS

Toronto, Ont., Oct. 2d. — The gentleman arrested as a spy at the wireless station on Toronto Island on Sept. 28th and since confined in Stanley Barracks, is being sought for by his wife, who forwarded an appeal to the military authorities yesterday. Mrs. Mathews insists that her husband is not a spy.

She declares in explanation of his suspicious conduct that he is an inventor and was seeking information concerning the construction of the wireless and that he is an inventor of merit, having sold his invention to some European government. Gen. Otto is investigating the design which may yet prove to be the true one. If so, the prisoner will be released.

She rang for Thelma and said, "Send Viola Minor to me at once."

As Viola enters Lettie, deep in meditation, does not notice her entrance. Viola does not need any words to tell her that Lettie knows the news.

"You wish to see me, Lettie?"

Lettie gave a start.

"Yes. I did not know you had entered the room. You came in so quietly. I think you have already seen the news that the man we both thought dead is worse than that."

"He is not dead, neither is he worse than that, for I believe Howard Mathews guiltless."

"I see that you have represented yourself as his wife."

"Not that, exactly, but I wrote for her."

"Did she ask you to?" asked Lettie almost defiantly.

"No, but I knew she did not know her own heart. If she did she would find the man blameless. Howard Mathews would never be guilty of such an act and time will prove the truth of my assertion. Some time you will be glad to know that I acted on the impulse as I did. It may not have been discretion, but it was the better part of valor. Lettie, when you thought he was dead you mourned him. Too late you realize what he was to you. Now he is in shame and sorrow you have no kind word, no encouragement to give to him in his crucial hour."

Lettie bowed her head, the red flush of shame mantling her face.

"I do care for him. That is why I never got a

decree. I waited, hoping that in time that gulf between us would be closed."

"Time has told, Lettie. It has shown you your true heart and the love for your husband. Will not the wife write her own message to him? Only do not let him know it was another that sent the first message."

"I will, Viola, I'll do it at once. Do you think he still cares for me?"

"I am sure of it and that he is anxious to claim his own."

"Do you think if they free him he will come back to us?"

"'When I want you I will send for you. Until then we are strangers.' Those were your very words, Lettie."

"Then I will send for him."

But fate intervened; the letter was received, but by another Mathews.

Lettie to Howard:

After I read of your arrest as a spy it was as if I was being beaten to earth by alternate blows of joy and of grief, for I care — I care. I cannot wait to tell you, I am so wretched. Questions of life and right and wrong all dissolve in the white heat of one fact. I didn't see or hear or know. I put my head on the table and sobbed, simply felt an oversurging love — remorse for all the past. If our life had been a happy love affair I couldn't write this. I would have decent reserve, I hope. I would wait, maybe, and let you find out things slowly. But now there isn't time. I have to tell you now, because this may be the last. But I can't let you throw away your life not knowing I cared. It has left me blind

and shaking to send this. I did not mean to give in until all shadows had been removed from our path, but I care — I do care. LETTIE.

"Will that suffice for the time being, Viola?"

"Yes, Lettie, it will show him you care for him and when he answers it you may make your next note to him of a more affectionate nature. He needs your love, your friendship, now, in this his hour of trial."

"If he should answer —"

"Yes, Lettie, if — well, you can use that little word if — for — shall I confess to you, his wife, that I of your kin and blood have written to him, not once, not twice, but frequently, and only once have I received word from him, soon after he left to go abroad. When I answered it, I chided him for not persevering in clearing this mystery up and bringing you to your senses. I told him I would not write again until he gave me the promise to look this woman up and get to the bottom of facts, and I never heard from him again."

Could Viola and Lettie have only known the truth that Howard Mathews never received their messages, but that one Harold Mathews did, who, believing that they were messages from the woman whom he had deserted, flung them contemptuously aside.

Howard Mathews had arrived at the lodge of Lone Man's Ranch nearly a month past with Conrad White, his most intimate friend and who was fast becoming an expert in designing and assisting Mathews in his invention, who, in order to hide his

identity, had taken the name of Frank Manville and had added to his domicile as his guest James Hoylt, and Earl Winnegar, a young student whom he had met on board the ship coming over and who had accepted his invitation to partake of the hospitality of his camp.

Four years had passed since he had left to go abroad and these had been years of work and hard labor. Strange he had never heard from Viola Minor. An impulsive nature as hers was, he did not think she would desert him. Possibly she, too, thought he was guilty of deserting the mysterious woman. In some way he must intercept Lettie and find out for himself if she had transferred her affections to another or if she still cared for — But why such thoughts?

"When I need you, I will send for you," and she had never sent, not even a word of kind cheer. Bitter indeed must be her thoughts of him.

Nettie Meets Mathews

Martin, with Nettie as his companion, was walking across the field watching the men at work in the fields and Nettie after a time got a ride on the big planting machine, when Martin thought it was safe to do so. She heard the men talking to him about a new occupant of the lodge and of the repairing of the interior.

"If I didn't have the kid with me I believe I would go along over."

Nettie realizing that she was the interfering kid referred to, spoke up, "Suppose you take the kid

along with you. It's me, isn't it? You needn't stop over that little thing. I can walk it. I'm six now."

"Take her with you, Martin. Take her at her word. Put her on the machine. I'm going that way."

"Then over we go, Miss Nettie."

In a short time they arrived at the lodge.

Nettie liked the big boss, as they called the nice looking man who seemed to do all the talking.

"Say, suppose you introduce yourself to me," spoke up the little girl, as she glanced into his face.

"Why, how do you do, little lady? Where did you alight from?" he said.

"On the machine — walked the rest of the way."

"And your name?"

"Nettie Merriman. Now you know mine, what's yours?"

"You can call me — Frank."

"Frank what?"

"Oh, just Uncle Frank. Then you are Mrs. Merriman's little girl over on the Lone Man's Ranch. I would know it, for you resemble your mother very much."

"Say, what's 'semble mean?"

"To look like, to be a counterpart of her."

"Do you know mother?"

"Yes — no — well, I met her some years ago."

"Then you must know her, for if you only met mother once you'd know her. She is always the same. Every one says I am like her. I guess that's why you know me after the first time, for you cer-

tainly asked me questions enough and they don't do that only when they know people a long time. It's because I am like her, for every one loves mother. Don't you think you will love mother?"

"I think I will."

"Don't you love her already?"

"I guess so."

"Well, you ought to know whether you do or not. You either got to love or hate her. No half and half with mother.'

"We must not hate any one, so I love her."

"I'll tell mother that you love her too. That I love you; you love me, and we both love her."

"Don't you do that. You must not."

"Why, you said you did."

"But I am a man and a stranger and she wouldn't think that was right of me."

"But you said you knew her before I did."

"I didn't just mean that, child. I simply made a mistake. I don't like women very well. I'm what you call a woman hater."

"That's too bad. I was going to bring mother over to get you to come and make your 'quaintance."

"Don't you do it. I never meet women — I don't like them. Promise me you never will bring her to the camp. Will you promise me that?"

"I won't bring her if you say not to. It wouldn't be very polite if I did. But you are a funny man and you hurt me here," and she put her hand where her heart lay. "Didn't you love your mother?"

"With all my heart, but that was different. Some day I will tell you, Nettie, what changed me; but perhaps, before that time, love and nature will

tell you the story itself. Here comes Joe. He is beckoning to you."

"Do you want me to come to the camp any more? I'm a woman, you know."

"But I thought you were a boy. Which are you, Nettie?"

"Both. I am a boy in the morning and a girl in the afternoon."

"Then come when you are a boy."

"Then when I'm a girl I have to stay away? I'm near six now and mother says I've got to be a girl all the time, so then I can't come to see you, can I?"

"Yes, come. If you stayed away I should commit suicide or go to the insane asylum. It's the only way I can hear from her or feel near her."

"Who is her?"

"The big white bird, Nettie. The experiment."

"Good-bye, Uncle Frank. I'll come again, sure."

"Sure, any time that Joe will bring you."

"Even if I'm a girl?"

"Even if you are a girl."

.

Some time afterwards Lettie spoke in regard to the lodge.

"Thelma, what is that hammering going on up near the Red River? Heard it as I was out in the fields yesterday and Nettie has been going up there with Martin. Likes to see the men work, she says."

"Martin says it's the lodge being fixed over by a man who bought the old place."

"But I always supposed the lodge belonged to this estate."

"So I told Martin, but he said no. It was never sold with the estate, but kept separate. They are building a long shed-like thing. Don't nobody know what it is yet. There is a party of them that came over in the ship together, for Martin heard them telling of some of them being seasick, and the shed is to hold a big bird brought over by one of them."

"Probably some sportsmen who have selected the forest for hunting purposes. I do not think it best for Martin to take Nettie over there until we find out what sort our neighbors are."

"I think, ma'm, they be all right, for the boss is a mighty nice man, Martin tells me, and they all are learned men and think the little tot about 'it.' She knows who she likes best of them all and calls most of them by name. The head one he thinks must have lost his wife, maybe his child, too, for he is as tender as a woman with Nettie. The others say he won't look at a woman only as courtesy requires him to. He asks one thing of the others; not to bring any woman into the camp and that is their motto, and they have a big sign to that effect hung in a prominent place."

"I believe I will take Nettie out with me this morning for a little recreation. I have left her much to herself of late. Come, Nettie, would you like to go fishing this morning? I will have Thelma put us up a luncheon."

Late that morning Lettie, dressed in her short skirt and Nettie in overalls, her golden hair blowing in disorder to the wiles of the breeze, sat fishing.

"Getting hungry? You have beaten Muzzer at

the fishing game this morning. Drop your pole for a while until we get a bite to eat.

"Now, Nettie, while we are partaking of our lunch, I am going to tell you a story about a wee little babe who was left without a mother."

Then she told Nettie her own birth story, adding "And this Auntie loved this little girl so she did not want to tell her that she wasn't her own mother, but that her own died when she was a wee little babe. Now what do you think this Auntie should have done? Told her that truth or still let her think that she was her own mother?"

"I wouldn't have done it."

"Done what, Nettie?"

"Told her she wasn't the girl's own mother, 'cause it would break her heart. It's hard not to have your own daddy but it's worse not to have your own mother."

"But wouldn't that be the same as an untruth? It would be deceiving, would it not?"

"I s'pose so, but I'd rather—oh, say, she wouldn't need to say she was or wasn't her own mother."

Lettie never told her the real truth for she could not take the chances of breaking the little girl's heart, as Nettie put it.

Nettie tired of these sports and soon they started home.

"Say, Muzzer, can't I keep on these old duds this afternoon? I want to go over with Joe to the cabin."

"But, Nettie, aren't the men rough over there?"

"Not a bit. There's a nice man there and he won't let them be rough and he asked me what my

name was and dad's name. I told him my dad went away long ago and he didn't ever come back. He asked me if you was my real mother. I said 'Yes,' and then I said, 'Now I've introduced myself, you tell me who you are, and he said 'You can call me Uncle,' and I said, 'Uncle what?' and he said, 'Uncle Frank.' I said, 'Is that your real name?' and he said, 'Yes, to you' and then —"

"And then what —"

"He said, 'Are you a boy or girl?' And I said, 'Both,' and then he laughed. I told him that I was a boy in the morning and a girl in the afternoon."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PICTURE

"JOE, get your gun! There is a fine deer over there and my appetite has been whetted to the key for a taste of venison," called out Mathews.

Carefully they stalked near the deer which was grazing, but the deer, always on the alert for danger, seemed to scent it, for it pricked up its ears and then ran toward the underbrush.

"He's run into the bush down by the river there, probably to his mate, for he is a fine buck, sir."

"Give me first shot, Joe. I want to be a sportsman and land that deer."

Through the tangled bush he pushed, cautiously he wended his way. Suddenly he stopped short at the scene before him.

"Stand back, Joe. Don't make a sound," he said.

"Not a doe and her fawn, sir?"

"Yes, it's a doe and her fawn and the most beautiful picture you ever saw. The fawn is a counterpart of its mother."

"And the buck, sir, is he there?"

"Yes, Joe, that buck is also here, but not with its mate. You can go back to the cabin and look after the men. We will not continue the chase. The scene has unnerved me."

"You're not the first man whom the pleading eyes of a doe with her little one have stayed their hand from taking the life of her mate."

He stayed there long after Joe had disappeared, trying to stifle the longing of his heart to speak just one word to her who was his mate — to clasp her in his arms; to have her know his great love for her in all its purity. For the picture he had seen that day was as he had said, the doe and fawn, his mate and the little one as they sat fishing. As he watched them he could see by her manner that she was conversing on some interesting subject, perhaps telling the little one a story.

That afternoon Nettie came over to the camp. He questioned her in regard to her relation to the woman of Lone Man's Ranch, and during their conversation she told him of the story of the little orphan, "and mother loved me harder than she ever did before. I guess she felt glad it wasn't me, for it is awful not to have an ownest daddy, but it would be worse not to have an ownest mother. Aren't you glad, Uncle Frank, that I did have a mother?"

His answer was a decisive whistle, as if an idea had entered his mind.

"What's your whistle for?"

"To let out my pent up feelings."

"What's them?"

"Why, it's bad feeling that I've stored away in my heart, and when you hear good news it enters in and drives the bad out. I whistled to let the bad out."

"And if you whistle again will the good come out again?"

"I'll not whistle again, so the good will stay in. Are you going home when Joe goes over?"

"I suppose so. Thelma said I must."

"Well, what are you going to do while I'm over at the shed experimenting?"

"Don't you do it, Uncle Frank."

"Do what?"

"Why, 'speriment, for Thelma says your 'speriments is apt to explode some day and when it does you'll be the one to go up."

"Ha, ha! don't you fear, little one. My experiments are safe ones and I'll be more apt to fall down than to blow up."

"Can I come over with you and see you 'speriment? I'm not afraid of birds, even if Conrad did call it a big bird. Yes, and he said it had flown you to honor. What's honor?"

"Oh, any old thing people throw at you to make you think you are it."

"And did it make you think you are it?"

"No, not in one way. If I had had some one to share it with me, it might have done so."

"Didn't you have any little girl or boy and mother to share it with?"

"No, dear, not one."

"Then you're not a daddy. Don't you want to be one?"

"God wouldn't let it be so."

"That is the baddest of all, that is worser than me. I've got a mother and a daddy somewhere if God did not call him." Silence, then a sob.

"Nobody knows, that is what mother says. I told her perhaps you were my daddy, 'cause I love you so awful much, but she wouldn't let me say that."

"And she said what, Nettie?"

"Nothing, only 'Not another word. You have got to go to sleep.' Only she said it in mother's way. You know how mothers say anything."

"Yes, dear, I know how mothers say things, but Joe is calling to you, so I have to let my little sweetheart go."

She ran towards Joe, waving her little hands to him, then stopped and called back, "Oh, Uncle Frank, don't you wish I was your own little — " and the rest was lost to him in the distance.

That night Nettie had much to tell of the camp and of the big shed they were building to keep the bird in, as Nettie said. As she ended her prayers that evening, Lettie was startled to hear her add, "And, dear Jesus, make that little motherless girl love her Auntie who tooked her and make her the loviest little girl in the world forever and ever." Lettie grasped the little white-robed figure in her arms and squeezing her tight, kissed her over and over again.

"Oh, mother, I guess that's a Satan squeeze you gave me. It feeled that way."

"What do you know about Satan squeeze, I'd like to know?"

"Why, that's what Uncle Frank says sometimes, that the man squeezes his pocketbook like Satan."

"I do not think that you learn the best of expressions at the cabin. I think you had better not go there any more."

"Oh, Mother, don't keep me away from Uncle Frank, for he said if you did he'd commit suicide or go to an insane asylum, and he said I was so much like you, especially when I was in girl's clothes."

"But I've never seen this man, Nettie. Why should he compare you to me?"

"Perhaps not, Mother, but he seems to know a whole lot about you. Perhaps he's a poor man who you were kind to once."

"We won't talk about it any more. Suppose you let me tuck you in bed now and you close those little eyelids and go to dreamland."

"I'll go right to sleep if you'll let me ask you something."

"Well, just this one."

"Why don't you ever go and see Uncle Frank? He's just lovely and he's been on big ships and oh, Mother! he might tell us of daddy. I hope my daddy when I find him will be just like Uncle Frank. Do you ever think I'll have an owniest daddy, Mother?"

Lettie bent and kissed her. "I hope so, dear. You have a daddy somewhere if God hasn't called him. We can only wait and hope. You mustn't tire your brain by so much thought. In time everything will be righted."

"And I wish that time was just this minute. P'rhaps Uncle Frank is he all the time and he don't know it — would God tell him somehow?"

"Now, Nettie, you promised if I answered just one question, that you would go to sleep. Not another word, dearie. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mother, but I do wish God would tell him."

.

Soon after Viola arrived from across the waters Lettie sent an invitation to come and stay with her

for a while as Nettie needed some one to look after her; not as a nurse, but more as a companion. "I know what success has been added to your musical talent, Viola, and since God has given you that great talent, use it. Not only for the rich who can pay to hear your beautiful voice, but to the lowly who seldom are offered such great opportunities to hear rivals of a national songster. Nettie unnerves me by the constant begging for her daddy. She has grown into a beautiful child with golden curls. She has a characteristic talent of her own. The talent to read people's character and their personality. It is often amusing, sometimes the results are otherwise. A longing to see you has made the two years very lonely with you so far away. Do come. Let me know the time and day. Not many people near us, but we can get to them once in a while, visiting ranches."

The beautiful days of early autumn seemed fading away when the trolley stopped at the little plateau station near the Indian settlement and let a passenger off, a young woman of English appearance. Hardly had she stepped from the car when she was encircled by a pair of firm arms.

"Viola! I am so glad you came. It is like a glimpse of heaven to see you again. How in the world did Aunt Fanny ever consent to let you come after all these absent years?"

"Only two years, cousin mine, and to me the years flew."

"To me they dragged, but not so much this last year, as I had been planning for so many amusements and I have work for you to do to help me

raise money for a building for the advancement of our young people who otherwise would have to go into the city for pleasure and excitement."

"For goodness sakes, you're not after my pocketbook already, I hope! I assure you it is not bulging out with that most desirable of all — bank roll; instead, it is quite to the contrary."

Lettie laughed. "Oh, not by any means. I am after other people quite remote from my own relatives. First I want a Jack and Jill party. That is for Nettie's Little Folks' Club. Of course, we shall ask some of the big Jacks and Jills. Then after that's over with I want to have a large fête or carnival. But I am not going to tell you of my plans any more until later, so we won't say anything more in regard to social details until after tea, or perhaps tomorrow, for I am eager to hear the details of your trip abroad."

This first evening of the cousins' meeting after more than two years of separation passed only too swiftly and it was going on to the early hours of morning when each sought the solitude of her own room. It was a fortnight after, when the Jacks and Jills were holding their frolic, that Viola conceived the idea to invite the students from the camp with other young people of the vicinity to a social time at the ranch. The week following that Viola suggested that they now ask the boys from the camp down; they are all young men from the University. A good idea! Viola and she would set to work at once.

For a few days Lettie and Viola were busy writing invitations. They were to ask other young

men and women from nearby ranches and also Marjorie was to be sent for, and for a few days a seamstress was busy fixing over one of Lettie's dresses which had composed her trousseau.

The evening of the great party had arrived and Nettie watched eagerly all comers, but the one whom she watched for did not arrive. Lettie found Nettie was missing a little later, but Thelma informed her mistress that she had seen her with Joe and assured her that he certainly would look carefully after her. If they had only known where Nettie was at that very moment, Lettie would have felt more uneasiness at her absence, for at that moment she was nearing the lodge with Martin.

When she saw Frank she greeted him with, "Why didn't you come with them, Uncle Frank? It's just beautiful."

"I'm sorry, little girl, but I had to stay away."

Nettie begged and pleaded for him to go.

"Can't you just peep in?" she said.

"Some one would think I was a burglar if I did that and 'pinch' me."

"I wouldn't let them, Uncle Frank. Please just come and take a peep; it is all so beautiful and mother is the most beautiful of all. She has shiny things on her hair and her dress is all gold and white. Viola says it is one of the dresses she had when she got married."

At last he consented to go. She almost dragged him along, so fast did her little feet go, all the time holding tight to his big strong hand. Part of the way he carried her "puss back."

Yes, she was as beautiful as that night he had

seen her at Mrs. Whittman's and as independent. He loved her then; he loved her far more today, and some one else would step in and gain that which he had lost.

"Can you see mother?" whispered Nettie.

"Yes, I see her," he replied. Lettie had turned just as Nettie was urging him to hold her up so she could see too.

She saw his face distinctly; she saw the white face, the set lines about the mouth. The teacup she held fell from her hand to the floor and she fell in a swoon, the first time she had fainted in her life.

She never knew Nettie's part in that night's drama, for Uncle Frank had urged Nettie to secrecy, although she had refused at first, saying that to deceive was the same as to tell a falsehood; but her fear of being deprived of the visits to the camp kept her silent.

Lettie was convinced that Mathews died that night and that he had come as a phantom or spirit to visit her, and for a long time she was too ill to leave her room. The secret of his visit and the face at the window remaind a secret between Viola and herself. She grieved deeply, for she knew that her leaving him as she did had been a great mistake; although she felt he had not loved her, she had learned the lesson of life with the lesson of love. After she was well enough to take up her duties again she resolved to do more than she had for the comfort of those around her; for those whose threads of life had been snapped as hers had been; to atone in whatever way she could for her mistakes in life, although she had never been sure of what

love existed between the other woman and Howard Mathews. He had been loyal to her. While she had promised him freedom from his bonds and he had given her every opportunity to get it, she had never tried to get a decree and she felt sure that his face at the window that night was when he had come to reproach her in his last moments, for her nature was that of a reclusive and imaginative element.

She was at present in a morose and depressed spirit, but there was so much work to be done for those less fortunate than herself that she resolved to throw off this dejected mood and think of others. There was the Fermer family that she had been spoken to about by the pastor. She started out that very day to see what she could do for them.

Walking her horse along in a slow trot and deeply thinking the best way to bring relief to the Fermer family, Lettie's attention was attracted by some one coming through the underbrush. It was Fermer trying to carry a large venison in the shape of a deer. How strangely he acted, for he had laid it down and was looking around as though not wishing to be seen with his burden. Then he started on but kept well in the shadow of the thicket, keeping the animal well on that side. Something was surely wrong. She dismounted until he was well ahead, then she quickly mounted her steed and rode slowly toward the Fermer domicile. There she saw him skulking toward the shed some rods from the house. She would ride on so as to give him time to complete whatever piece of work, or what

looked to her to be dishonest work, he was bent upon.

Having purchased some necessary articles at the village for the improvident family, she returned to their abode. As she entered she saw on the fire a kettle steaming away and from it issued the fragrant and appetizing odor of venison.

"How is the lady today?"

"Nicely, Mistress Merriman, and I have been getting some nourishing food as you suggested for her."

"Good, but, my good man, I intended to see to that for you. I have already sent in the order. What kind did you secure?"

"It's deer meat, madam, but that is nice and tender and it will be sure to make us as good broth as any meat. I hope your ladyship will agree with me."

"Not if it cost dear for it, as I know you are not the best of marksmen. I conclude it must have been bought or a friend did the shooting for you, and now which am I to believe, my good man?"

He did not answer.

She knew he would not lie, for she knew Charles Fermer for the truthful man he was. She must find out the truth.

After what service she could render to the sick sister was accomplished, she made ready to go on her homeward way. There was no Charles in sight to aid her as usual.

She hesitated for a minute, then decided to see him — she must. Around to the shed she went,

around the corner of which curled a small streak of smoke.

"Mr. Fermer!"

"Yes, Madam."

"I wonder if you do not want to give me a piece of that venison. You know I am a pretty good shot myself and I should fill my larder, but do you know, even if I can eat their flesh, I cannot kill the little things. Why, just one look into their beautiful eyes unnerves me and I cannot aim at them."

"I would like to give you some, but what portion do you prefer?"

"I would like a piece of the hindquarter or almost any piece will do."

He bravely cut it off for her, but as he went to hand it to her he hesitated, not even offering it to her.

"Well —" she said.

He looked up into her face.

"I can't somehow give it to you, Mrs. Merriman."

"You haven't got to if you need it or if you deserve it, you had better keep it."

"It may be I need it, but I do not deserve it and it is not because I am sparing of it. I can't bear to give it to you because it —"

"Because of what?" (She laid her hand on his shoulder.)

He dropped the piece of meat and bent his face in his hands.

"Shall I answer it for you? Because you had no right to it, for yourself or to give it to others. Have I spoken right?"

"My God, how did you know? But you cannot know how you have hurt my feelings when you

offered to get things for me — you who has everything. I'd rather steal than accept from those people who shun us poor people and only offer us charity, forgetting that we too have pride. Personally I would starve before I'd steal a thing, but I couldn't see her dying there for the want of that nourishment and those fellows up there who has plenty going to have a feast with their stomachs filled up already. Oh, God, you don't know what it is to have been some one once and then to sink until you are offered charity."

"Mr. Fermer, I don't know but you are right, but I do know what it is to want the love and friendship of those who think they are beneath me because misfortune has overtaken them and their pride won't let them come to me; and as I have never been in their position I have not the tact to know the way whereby I can enter the doors of their hearts. Mr. Fermer, I believe what you have done today you did not do for the evil of it, from your heart or mind. It was for the love of her who bears the honor of your name. I know you do not wish this thing to be found out; if you would only put confidence in me, I am sure in some way I could aid you out of this guilty act, although it was, as you say, a needed one. Won't you let me be your friend?"

"My friend after this? You do not mean this."

"I do, surely, or I would not have said it. I mean it from the bottom of my heart." She was holding out her hand to him and before he knew it, he had taken it in his own rough ones.

"I believe you are one of those Christians who live up to their doctrines. I did steal the deer. I

took it from the camp last night and hid it until it was safe enough to bring it home." He dropped her hand and looked at her like an animal beseeching for his life.

"This, Charles, shall be a secret between ourselves. I will see that the affair is righted some way or other. You just trust me and there will be no harm or suspicion fall in your way, I am sure. I am going now. Good-night, Charles. The man who would rather sell his life than tell a falsehood, is the man I want as my friend."

"Shall I see you mounted?"

"Yes, if you please. I missed you tonight when I left to go home and that is why I looked you up. We are both glad of it, aren't we?"

"And you knew I was a thief?"

"I was not sure — only suspected, but I wanted the truth. Good-night and don't worry. Just put your trust in Him who doeth all things best. He will find a way."

Two Pathways of Duty

Frank was up at daybreak, hoping to get a sight of a deer, for he knew how disappointed the boys were and how keenly they felt the loss of their anticipated feast. He loaded his rifle, slung on his cartridge belt and stalked through the woods. As he emerged through the underbrush he spied a fine buck speeding toward the cornfield. He had just obtained a fine place of vantage and raised his gun to fire when a shot rang out and he saw the animal drop. He stood there, perplexed. Who could have fired that shot? Some one from the

Indian reservation, probably — maybe a companion to the one who stole the other deer. A figure rose from the undergrowth; he watched it. It was she, — Lettie, whom Nettie had said never would stoop to kill one of those beautiful animals. She had taken but a few steps toward where the beautiful creature lay in its death struggles when she suddenly dropped on her knees and covered her face with her hands. At that moment Martin appeared and dragged the carcass into the shade of the underbrush and, Lettie following, was soon hidden from view. Frank wondered why she had killed this deer when it brought sorrow and distress to her to do such an act. It could not possibly be because it was devouring her corn, for other preventions could have been brought to bear besides that of taking its life. With this mental question still unsolved he went back to the lodge. Conrad had arisen just in time to see Frank shoulder his gun and stride away. He had noticed the deer going toward the cornfield from the other side of the woodland; had heard the shot, and when Frank returned empty handed, noticed the dejected air and his silence.

"Missed it, did you," he said, "because you played hog and would not let any one else into your little game of sport. So there won't be any venison for the boys tonight, hey?"

"It certainly looks that way," was Frank's reply.

"Say, Frank, it wasn't one of your 'fawn and doe cases' was it?"

He did not answer.

"I thought so. You will have to get over that

heart failure of yours if you intend being a sporting man or the boys will be getting the laugh on you."

Frank made no response to the sally but passed into the shed where he worked like a beaver the rest of the day on his aeroplane so as to keep out of the way of the boys questioning him, and when night came he was tired enough to seek his sleeping quarters earlier than usual; but the boys sat up, each one trying to plan a way to find out and capture the thief of the venison.

.

The boys were still sleeping in the morning when Frank awoke and went out to start the coffee cooking. He stood there staring. Could he believe his eyes or was it an hallucination! A deer, and hanging from the very place the last one had been stolen from.

"Conrad!"

"Hello, there."

"Come here and see if I've got a vision or if it is true the carcass is back."

"Frank, I believe we both have fallen clean off the water wagon. Say, let's feel and see if it's true or if it's a joke of the boys."

Frank had taken but one glance when instinct told him that this was not the same deer that was stolen. Thus little by little the truth cleared the case before his mind. It was the one Lettie had shot the day before, he felt sure.

"Conrad, can you keep a secret?"

"Try me, old man, and see."

"This deer is not the one that was stolen. Looks much larger. It is a buck too, and the one you brought in was a doe."

"I should say, by Jove!"

"Yes, not only that, but you remember my silence yesterday when I returned without this buck?"

"Yes."

"Well, I sighted this buck yesterday, — was about to aim when some one else shot and he fell. *She* shot him. He has been brought to our camp to cover up the guilty one, I believe, and that guilty one must have been in destitute circumstances or she would have never taken this way of covering up the guilty act. The best way to do is to skin and dress this one before the boys get onto the scheme and think it was not a joke on them. The only trouble is I must crawl over Holt to get the skinning knives; but I'll do it."

"Say, Mathews, we have to get a hustle on, and let me add one more word — she is a stunning widow and will make some one a good wife. Why can't you shine up to her and let us make a double wedding of it?"

What a dumbfounded company they were when they saw a deer hanging on that same tree; but to all their questions they were assured that it was a good joke on them all.

.

Mathews took frequent trips and on one of them Nettie unexpectedly came upon him as he started to rise in the air. Her eyes almost fell out of their sockets as she gazed at the wonderful thing which was bearing her best friend away toward the blue

sky. When at last he was so far away that he looked like a speck in the clouds above, she ran with tears in her eyes to Conrad and the others and with sobs asked him, "What is that which has carried Uncle Frank away?"

"Why, Nettie, it's that big white bird broke loose from its shelter," Conrad told her.

"But isn't it ever going to bring Uncle Frank back?"

"Yes, dear, when it gets tired it will land back here."

"Can I stay till she comes back," she asked.

Joe, as he took her by the hand, said, "No, he doesn't want any one to see that bird and he won't like it if he sees you here when he gets back. The best thing for you is to go home and forget."

As they started to leave they were startled by exclamations from the others. Joe turned back to find out the cause of the excitement and saw that the aeroplane was returning. Possibly something was amiss or wrong with the mechanism which was supposed to be perfect. He waited until it had reached terra firma. Mathews jumped to the ground and excitedly informed the others that he had, while sailing around, sighted in the Unein Bay a gasoline launch which he believed carried wireless apparatus and was acting as a scout or spy. He thought better to inform the boys that he would be gone longer on his experiment trip as he intended to take a good chance at a near view of the launch, and if he thought his fears well founded he would fly to Connexpit and inform the authorities; but he desired first to be sure his surmises were correct.

As soon as he again sailed into the air, Joe led Nettie home. All that any one could get from that doleful countenance and that long drawn expression was that Uncle Frank had gone with the bird.

Lettie comforted her with the cheering words that he would soon be back again and that possibly business or other good cause called him away, to which Nettie replied, "Yes, he went up once before and he returned to tell them to wait until he would go a longer way," which news was unintelligible to Lettie.

Mathews' surmises were true. The launch was seized; the crew, two men and a woman, were taken into custody. In the launch was found about nine months' provisions and supplies. It was carrying three auxiliary engines and was equipped with wireless apparatus. These persons were charged with being German spies.

On his return Mathews told the boys at the lodge of his success.

"They greeted me as a friend and the crew insisted on talking to me in German. I can only speak a few words and then only fairly well. Still they jabbered to me in a foreign tongue and finally desisted as it seemed to occur to them that for some unknown reason I would not acknowledge that I knew their native tongue or understood it. That they mistook me for another person, I am almost sure."

"That means a medal for you," said Conrad. "Your name will be in the paper tomorrow."

"I think not. I gave a fictitious name. All they know is that I am an aviator and for a few days I

do no more flying, so there will be no clue to follow."

"The little one saw you and she's afraid that you have gone to the unseen world."

"She did not know facts, did she? So it is safe, she cannot tell, can she?" he asked Conrad.

"No, I just told her it was the big bird that took you away, but she was frightened and the salt water stood in those big orbs of hers for fair."

"Poor little thing, she will be afraid of me for a while. We will have to smooth it over some way. By the way, get a box of bonbons when you go downtown tonight. Don't forget! Here's the coin," and he tossed a silver dollar to him.

CHAPTER XV

THE OTHER ONE'S DADDY

DICK GREENE had been at the tavern again. He had a temper as red as his hair, which cost him many jobs, until at length he was more often unemployed than otherwise. He began to drink and now spent more time at the tavern than any other place. Dick had been not too politely ordered out of the tavern that day, so had lain down under a shady elm tree. Nettie, walking along and thinking of her poor man's flower plot and watching for some extra pretty wild flowers to pull up and plant in her garden, saw Dick lying there. He must be ill, she thought, and straightway walked up to him.

"Say, Mr. Man, are you ill? You better let me hold yer head or p'rhaps you'd like me to git you some water. That's what they give people that's faint, you know."

Dick looked at her through his bleared eyes. "I think you better run along, little kid. Most folks don't like to be seen associatin' with Dick Greene and it won't do you any good to be found in my company. I'm tellin' ye that, so skidoo there!"

"But you're somebody's daddy, isn't you, or is you like poor old Raffles that was buried? He wasn't nobody's daddy, but he was once somebody's little boy and that's why mother and I gather the

flowers. It showed somebody cared for him, you know, and now mother and I have another club — the Goodwill Floral Club. You see I haven't any daddy so I think of other little girls' daddies."

"Ump! I guess you're better off than havin' daddies like some of em's got."

"That's what Kitty Greene says, 'It's better to be without a daddy than have one like hers.' Every little while he hurts her and sometimes he beats her, but it's because he stops at the tavern so much. You don't like the tavern, does you?"

He didn't answer.

"'Cause if you do you won't like our church, for those who stops at the tavern never comes to our church. Do you go to our church?"

"Naw," he growled. "I ain't never gone to any church since I was a kid."

"You ought to go. Why, our minister's the nicest man you ever saw. Mother says she can't see how men who ever have spoken to our preacher can bear that old tavern keeper with his vile ways, but that some men can't go by that place without dropping in. I should think they would run by it until they were 'way down the road, then they could get in the church. Mother says that Satan won't enter the church after any one but he is always watching for them to pull them into that old tavern and that makes a lot of our people so poor. Are you poor? Or doesn't Satan catch you to pull you in?"

"I guess he pulls me in fast enough. As for bein' poor, I don't know what it is to be anything else."

"Then if you're poor God loves you, for mother says Christ was always doin' for the poor and He healed the sick and He wouldn't do for the rich; for in the Bible it says it will be as hard for the rich man to enter heaven as for a camel to go through a needle's eye. So I'd think you'd be glad you were poor, and mother and I will come and see your folks and she will ask you to come to our church and you'll come, for no one refuses mother. I guess you know my mother, don't you?"

"No, I guess she's none of our class. She's a little higher up, I'm thinkin'. Whose little girl might you be?"

"Why, I'm Nettie Merriman. My mother lives up on the big ranch over that way."

"Not the lady who was so good to Charles Fermer's wife when she was ill?"

"That's her. Aren't you goin' home now? I think mother wants me home, but I don't want to leave you here alone, for you act sick."

"No, I'm not sick now. You'd better run on. I'll promise you I'll come right along."

"You sure you don't need me to help you?"

"No, I'm goin' home to be a new man. I'm goin' to be Kitty's daddy once more."

"Have you got a Kitty too?"

"Yes, but I haven't known it for a long time. I forgot I was a daddy."

"Oh, won't she be glad that you 'membered it, after all. I'm goin' right along 'cause Kitty Greene is comin' up with me to get the milk for her mother."

Dick Greene, with his head held aloft, was coming on behind. Soon Nettie was at Kitty's house

and just as they walked out of the gate together, Kitty saw her father coming.

"Somethin's happened unusual," she said. "Daddy's coming home early. Perhaps there's been a fight at the tavern."

"There's the man what was sick under the tree comin' now," said Nettie.

"That's daddy."

"Is that your daddy, Kitty Greene?"

"Yes, that's him."

"Well, don't you stir. He's comin' home to be a daddy to his Kitty. He just 'membered it and if you're his Kitty you just stay still till he sees you. He's goin' to tell you, — he said he was."

Kitty stood still. She could not comprehend the situation. Her father, with a kinder light in his eyes than she could ever remember of seeing before, came toward her.

"Hello, Kitty girl! Waitin' for me, are ye?"

"Nettie told me to stand still, that you were comin' to tell me somethin'. What is it, daddy?"

"I almost forgot, seein' you standin' here. Where's your mother?"

"Why, you were goin' to tell her that you 'membered you was her daddy," spoke up Nettie.

"So I was. I'm goin' to be your daddy, Kitty," as he patted her on the head. "I'm goin' now to find mother."

"She's out in the garden trying to git enough vegetables to sell to buy a little meat with. Don't curse her, father. She needs the nourishment."

"Don't worry, Kitty. I'm not goin' to curse her; I'm goin' to be a man again."

After he had gone Kitty began to cry.

"Why, Kitty Greene, what are you cryin' for? Why don't you laugh instead?"

"You would cry if it had been months and months since your daddy had ever spoken a kind word to you and then all at once spoke like that."

"I never had a daddy to do either way. Perhaps when he comes I shall cry, though. Aren't you comin' home with me?"

Together, with their arms around each other's waists, they walked toward the ranch. Kitty got her milk and started for home just as Viola and Lettie returned from the funeral over at Bushman's ranch. Nettie could hardly wait until her mother got into the house to tell her the story of Dick Greene being Kitty's daddy.

"Oh, Mother, please, I can't wait. Kitty says he won't hold out — he will go back to the tavern. There are so many to drag him back and no one to pull him the right way. I think Mr. Prentiss and you could pull him the right way, couldn't you?"

"Now, Nettie dear, I don't understand what you mean. Just as soon as I can get a bite to eat I will listen to you, but you must begin from the beginning."

Nettie watched her mother at the table in silence, afraid if she spoke her mother would stop eating.

"Aren't you going to eat anything, Nettie?" asked her mother.

"No, Mother."

"Why not?"

"'Cause — oh, please don't ask questions, Mother. It will make you stop eatin' and I'm so full of what

I want to tell you that I can't eat a mouthful until I get this story out of me, so don't talk. Just eat, Mother."

Lettie soon arose from the table and seating herself in the low rocker that she called hers and Nettie's "confidence chair" and taking Nettie on her lap said, "Now, Nettie, for your story."

Nettie unfolded the whole scene of her finding Dick under the tree and ending with what Kitty had said about him going back to the tavern.

"Won't you and Mr. Prentiss keep him back, Mother?"

"I will do what I can, dearie."

"Right now, Mother? Right away, please."

"Yes, right away. I'm going to call Mr. Prentiss on the telephone."

As she tucked Nettie in her bed and bent down and kissed her she said, "Dear little lamb of His flock! Already striving in your simple way to bring back the sheep to the fold again."

And Nettie, half asleep, murmured, "The Master wants the daddy sheep too."

Lettie and Viola went next day to see Dick Greene and offered him steady work on her place and asked him to try and hold out and stay in the strait and narrow way. She found him a very intelligent man when not under the influence of drink. He told them of his being unable to get work and when he did get employment of his being unable to hold it. After a while, on account of his getting to drinking, he became convinced that every one was against him and that the world owed him a living. They arranged to have Dick stay and make his home on

the ranch for a few days. After a few days he went to Lettie and told her there was no use; he couldn't keep a steady job. The longing for drink was too keen. She listened sympathetically to him and after a few days, with his consent and the help of Mr. Prentiss, went to work to have him admitted to a hospital to be cured of the drink habit. Mr. Prentiss and Lettie visited him there. All this meant much to Dick. "You have done more for me than any one else I ever knew," he said. "I wish I could do something for you."

"If I have done you a good turn," said Lettie, "pass it on. Every time you do some one a kindness I shall feel you have done something for me." Thereafter Dick began to think more and more of others. In so doing he forgot himself and in those weeks when he was striving to make a man of himself he had formed plans to help others. When he was out, a free man from the demon drink, he found that in helping others he helped himself. In a few weeks Martin brought him back to the ranch. He was given steady work and as a man of intelligence and learning he became Lettie's right-hand man. As her plans for making financial aid for that new institute building grew and made headway, she was glad of his advice and aid. He had practically made it possible for them to go ahead and complete the arrangements for a fête.

"Wish you had not quite fallen out with the Duke, Viola," said Lettie.

"And why, I'd like to know?"

"I might use him as a drawing card in my carnival."

"He surely would be a drawing card, but if it is a title you are looking for, I've got a higher one on my string."

"Viola Minor, are you joking?"

"Not at all, for on my list I will have Lord Calvan and also Lord and Lady Bononski."

"Do it, will you? It would draw the wealthy people of the city."

"Yes, but how have you planned to get them over, Lettie?"

"Mr. Prentiss, whom the Indians are loyal to, will get them to use their boats to bring the people over, while Conrad informs me the boss of the lodge has a boat of his own and at that point of the Indian landing automobiles will meet them, for every ranch owner has offered me his auto. We have everything but the people."

"Leave that to me, Lettie. I'll get the people. And I will get the best there are in the city with the Jacks and Jills and the Harvest Club and the cowboys from the ranches. It will be a money making affair and our institute building, I assure you, is almost started on its way."

"I do hope so, it is a needed thing here."

"Leave the cards of announcement to my care," said Viola.

"I will. Only get them out as soon as you can. I'm going to see Mr. Conrad and see if we can raise a little money by subscription and with our other societies we shall be able to add a little from time to time."

"Speak of angels, etc.," quoted Viola, as the head and shoulders of Conrad appeared around the corner.

"You are just the one I want to see," said Lettie.

"What's the trouble with Joyce?" he asked her.

"He's not the one I wish to see at the present time."

"I see, like all the other women, you want to be changing around all the time. First one and then the other."

"Be sensible, Conrad, just for a few moments, so I can tell you what I wish. Will you aid us in circulating a subscription? If we raise just a small amount it will be a stepping stone to the building, anyway."

"Good ideas, every one of them. Give me a paper; I'll start the subscription right away."

"Wait until after the carnival; we can't run everything in a heap."

"All right, but let us fellows over in the lodge help you out in your arrangements. We will do justice to whatever we put our shoulders to."

"I don't doubt one word of it and I shall use you all and shall ask your assistance in a great many instances."

"I'm going over to the camp now. I'm in a hurry to get over and sew the boys' coin pockets so they can't spend their 'mon' until that day of everybody's carnival." And with a wave of his hand he vanished.

"Aren't those young men just grand?" said Lettie. "It looks as if we might keep one of them for a while anyway," and she gave Viola a significant look.

"It's too bad the gentleman who owns the lodge is such a woman hater. We might have a chance

to go over and look around the camp once in a while. Mr. Conrad often said he would dearly like to invite us there, but the boss of the camp has laid the law down. Say, Lettie, I'd like to break that law just once."

"Don't try to, Viola. I tried it once when I started to go after Nettie, and Joe decisively, though politely, told me I was trespassing on forbidden ground."

"And you, the mistress of Lone Man's Ranch, did not resent his actions!"

"What else could I do? I couldn't insist in going to a place I was not wanted, could I?"

"I would have tried it over in the sneak act."

"Not I. I'll wait for an invitation. But I better leave you now and let you get to work on those invitations."

CHAPTER XVI

THE FÊTE

AND that day of all days to Nettie had arrived. Early that morning and before any one else had arisen she had gone downstairs to find that no one but herself was yet up. Going back to her mother's room she found that her mother had just begun dressing. Hurrying to her own room, with assistance she dressed herself and was soon ready for the duties of the day. After breakfast they adjourned to the open air. She began the preparations for the carnival and found the boys from the lodge already there getting ready to put up the large tent. Nettie's heart was beating with delight at the anticipated pleasures of the day. Only when her mother spoke to her in regard to paying her last visit to her garden before it was bespoiled of its beauty, did a cloud come over her happy disposition. As they walked toward the garden Lettie noted how quiet and sad her little daughter appeared. She noticed, as she glanced at Nettie, a pout fast appearing around her little mouth which always asserted itself when Nettie was displeased with anything.

"What are you displeased at, Nettie?"

"How'd you know I's displeased?"

"I saw that little crossbird sitting on that lip of yours. I wouldn't let that bird rest there so much if I were you."

"Well, I guess you'd keep him there if you wanted him to help keep the bad words back."

"What bad words do you need, Nettie?"

"Those I got to say when they took my fairy flowers away."

"Why, Nettie, if you can't give the blossoms up willingly, don't give them at all. We would much rather get along without them."

"Then God wouldn't like me if I kept them, but I wanted them for the poor man's funeral, who didn't have any one to love him or think of him."

"Perhaps when any one like that dies your flowers would also be dead. You know then they would have done no one any good."

For a few minutes Nettie was silent. Her little mind was at work. At last she glanced up at her mother saying, "Mother, I guess the crossbird is gone because kindness comes out of my heart."

As they again neared the front of the lawn Nettie slipped her hand out from her mother's, saying, "I think I'll just run back and say good-bye to the fairies who live in my flowers."

"All right, dearie, but don't be gone long. I may need you to save steps for me. But here come Viola and Marjorie, so you can stay as long as you wish among your flowers. I will not need you now."

Lettie turned to Viola and Marjorie to talk over the arrangements of the day. "It's a good thing you arrived last night, for you are such capable hands at arranging things and by the looks of things now we can soon begin arranging the booths." Nettie, starting toward the fairy bed, heard Joe call to her, "Good-morning, little lady."

"Good-morning, Joe."

"Say, where are you going?"

"Can't you come out with me and see my fairy flowers? It's the last time you can see them, 'cause they're going to take them."

"Can't now, 'cause I'm going over to the lodge."

"Oh, Joe, take me with you; that is, if you are coming right back."

"All right, if your mother says you may."

"Well, she said I could stay with my flowers, so I think I can go with you."

Going over she confided to Joe that she was glad she was going over to see Uncle Frank "'Cause I feel hurted to have my flowers 'turbed and I've got to 'fide in some one and I rather 'fide in Uncle Frank than any one else. Why, Joe, there's fairies in those flowers and I often think that when they fade and blow away that they carry messages to my daddy." And just then a ground squirrel, frightened at their appearance, ran across their path with that delightful little squeak of his and Joe, explaining their antics and their ways to Nettie, who loved always to hear about Nature's wild animals, forgot the distance to the lodge and they were there almost before Nettie realized they had really started. Frank was polishing his footgear, as he called it, and Nettie was surprised to see him dressed in regular cowboy style with a colored handkerchief around his neck and having on sheepskin leggins.

"Why, Uncle Frank, I should hardly know it was you, but I'd knowed your face. Are you going to ride the bronchos? Uncle Frank, I think that's love-light in your eyes, of all days today, I am sure."

"I am glad you think so, my dear, I didn't know I had anything shine in my eyes."

"Most always you do. It's like the shine what comes in your eye when you think the most you can think of any one. I tell you, Uncle Frank, it's the lovelight, cause that's the way mother looks when she cuddles me so tight to her and says she loves me."

"I think that must be it, Nettie; and it shines whenever you come around."

"I'm glad it shines when I come around, 'cause I wouldn't like it, I don't think, when others come, only if it was mother. I'd want you to let it shine so she could see it. Mother's worthy of it and I don't think she ever had any, only from some of the poor people which she is good to, and I think that's another different kind of love for it doesn't shine like yours. Daddy's been gone so long now, I guess she's almost forgotten how his love did look."

"Say, Nettie," he interrupted, "I've got to get down to the river and look after things, so as soon as Joe is ready, I'll walk part way with you." He had to cut her off; he could not stand the hurt when she talked of the woman of his heart.

"But I forgot to tell you what I wanted most to and I've got to 'fide it in you and get it out of my heart. It's about my fairy garden. They're going to take it and mother talked to me so nice about it I had to tell her and she said 'it's better to sell them than to let them die and blow away where they do no one any good.'"

"And don't you think your mother knows best about it?"

"S'pose so, but that ain't it. There's fairies in

those flowers and I whisper messages to them to take over to my daddy when they fly away and if I sell them they can't take the things I tell them to daddy." And a little sob rose in her throat and a teardrop trembled on her eyelids.

"Why not, Nettie, can't they die and fly away just as well picked as if in your garden?"

"Why, I never thought of that, Uncle Frank."

"Then don't you cry any more over such things. Come now, we are ready to go." Her hand clasped tightly in Frank's they walked across the field and as he left her and Joe and just before they turned in the path that leads to Lone Man's Ranch, Nettie tells him she is going right up to her garden the moment she gets back and bid her fairies good-bye, "And I'll tell them to look my daddy up for me and tell him I can't bear any longer his staying away and that mother wants him to come and that she keeps the lovelight in her face." And then as the thought came to her, she said to him, "You don't suppose you's him and you's forgotten it."

"No, dear, for I'm sure I'd remember."

"I'm awful sorry, for I love you next to mother."

After Nettie and Joe had left Frank he stood watching. Should he go over and just take a look? Perhaps he could see Lettie. He turned and followed the path which led him in full view of the front lawn, but he did not see her anywhere. Probably she was busy elsewhere. He would try and stop on his way back, or, rather, when he returned from the river.

There was much more to be done than he anticipated, for when he reached the river the Indians

were trimming up their boats in a beautiful and fantastic style. He soon lent a willing hand and he stood reviewing the completeness of the morning's work. He incidentally glanced at his watch. What! Noon? How the time had flown! After a few moment's hesitation in which he gave orders as to how the boats were to be arranged, as to their movements in regard to conveyance, he started for the lodge. He looked for Lettie but she was nowhere to be seen as he went close to the fête grounds. Possibly he might get a glance at her after he had returned from dinner. He could see the large white tent and the fortune teller's tent. The green lawn lay like a beautiful velvet carpet. It was indeed a beautiful sight.

He could hardly take time to eat, so eager was he to get and fulfil his part of the program. The boys were taking dinner or lunch possibly at the ranch, as none of them had shown up and he who had the most right to be there, sitting at the same table with her, without. Oh, well, it was to be! He would have to shake this feeling off. But this love of his only grew stronger as the days passed by. Why had she never sent for him? He must see Viola. No, that would spoil everything, for she, his wife, had been thrown at him once, as she had said, and he knew such a thing as asking or insisting on seeing her was out of the question.

"When I wish you to come I will send for you" were her words. "Oh, Lettie, how long the time has seemed! You have never sent for me! How much longer must I carry this thing on?" Still meditating, he arose, put on his cowboy hat and

sauntered down toward the river, turning as he struck the path that led to her and his ranch. Going a roundabout way he came upon Joe.

"Well, Mr. Frank, are you coming to help us out here too?"

"No, just looking after some transportation, — I mean looking for Nettie. Thought I'd give her the first ride."

"You'll find her up beyond the garden. At least that's the direction I saw her going a minute ago."

"Thanks, I'll find her."

The garden was riotous with color; huge oriental poppies on one side and borders of swaying white lilies on the other. Ranks of larkspur lifted blue spires beyond. The air was heavy with sweet mignonette and alyssum, the fragrance of roses, white and pink and red, over by the hedge. Nettie stood there loving and caressing the blossoms of her fairy garden, as she called them. She never noticed a figure standing there watching her intently until suddenly as though something disturbed her she turned and faced him. But his upraised head and gesture commanding silence checked her.

"I've come to ask you to have the first ride across the river. I'll bring you back again," and then, as he looked toward the velvet carpeting of the lawn almost hoping he might see Lettie, he espied her crossing the green lawn. He stood spellbound, not heeding Nettie's acceptance of his invitation. Nettie noticed his averted look and looking, saw her mother.

"Oh, that's her! That's mother!" she exclaimed. "Isn't she beautiful! Say, Uncle Frank, wouldn't

it be just grand if only daddy could see her now? Wouldn't he just love her better than the day he married her? Do you know, Viola says motherhood has just made her beautiful and she said if he only could see her now he'd love her more than ever. She meant my daddy, you know. I bet he'd love her today."

"He does love her — he always loved her. If she only would come half way," he had unwittingly uttered the words of his thoughts.

"Why, Uncle Frank, she'd come all the way to meet him, I know she would, for I heard her tell Viola she would, if he would only explain to her. But it's too late now; she thinks my daddy's dead, I know she does, cause she said 'I know that was his spirit I saw that night; whatever sin he did died with him,' but somehow I can't think my daddy ever could have sinned. If he did, he never meanted it. Why, Uncle Frank, that beautiful light is in your eyes again. I guess it's cause you see mother. Everybody loves mother. You do too, don't you?"

"Yes, Nettie, I love mother."

"Then you don't hate all the female species, as Conrad says you do. I told him I knew you would love mother and he just laughed. Now I'll get the laugh on him when I tell him you said you did."

"No, no, Nettie, you must not tell him anything of the kind, or your mother either. You see your mother's married and it isn't proper to love married women."

"But mother won't care, she'll be glad you do."

"Promise me, Nettie, you'll not tell. I'll not give you a boat ride until you promise."

"I won't tell her, then."

Away to the river they went, Nettie being carried part of the way astride his back. After a couple rides across the river Frank took her up as far as the edge of the lawn and watched her until she was safely at her mother's side and then returned to his duties of the afternoon.

Men and women of varied type made the gathering a piquant one. Lettie in her gown of sheer white; Viola in her dress of pink voile; Nettie in blue; Marjorie in pale yellow, lent enchantment to the view. Lettie easily reigned. She starred that gathering and it was by dint of something greater than her beauty. She made the other women present pale to neutrality beside her, and her husband, unknown, had watched her, listened to her, exalted in her. A large white tent contained the booths. A tea refreshment stand occupied a cozy corner with seats provided for the partakers. Viola greeted the guests, those unknown as well as those she knew. Almost the first to arrive was the tall slender blond Teuton, Lord Calvan, his blue eyes atwinkle and his Kaiser-ish mustache partially concealing a smile, and Lord and Lady Bononski were in the same auto, and every one from miles around was there, eager to help out. The ponies and mustangs borrowed from the ranches had been a taking card; the floral arrangement, a marvel of artistic art; the tables loaded down with the bounty of the field and culinary art. Conrad vied with Rev. Prentiss in being their right-hand man, while Dick Greene was in demand everywhere. Joyce aided here and there, while the young men of the camp lent willing

and helping hands. Everything that Lettie had suggested or wished for, Conrad saw was supplied. How or where he got it she could not imagine. Of all the social events this one beats them. From the city, crowds came. The boats that conveyed them across the Indian reservation were loaded to their capacity every trip and every one willingly paid the fee asked for conveying them over. The boats had been decorated with beautiful and antique Indian blankets in all the colors and patterns of marvelous beauty and wild flowers, and they were a pretty sight as they glided back and forth from bank to bank and the coin bag was fast filling up. Everything had been arranged systematically and the Indians in their native costumes made a wierd, beautiful scene, long to be remembered.

And on the lawn where the great fête was in progress there was no less a beautiful scene. Ladies with their beautiful costumes made a realistic scene as they moved hither and thither across the dark green velvet carpet of nature's own growth. The Indian ponies and mustangs caused a great deal of merriment, especially when some cowpunchers got on the mustangs and by a certain handling caused them to rear, buck, or to throw or lie down with their riders. But the merriment came when some one, not accustomed to their antics, attempted to ride them and, told by the knowing ones to slap, or rein or draw a certain way, was taken by surprise by the former doleful animals rearing, bucking, or in other various ways trying to throw their would-be riders. And all day long there was a crowd surrounding their corral, while the Jacks and Jills of

the younger set took more gentle rides on the ponies or the more daring ones raced back and forth.

Lettie, Viola, and Marjorie were here and there among the guests, showing first one and then another places or articles of interest.

According to arrangement, the wild flowers at the booth were sold first. Then would-be purchasers were led to the flower garden and the flowers cut and sold direct from the plant, and many had snapshots taken of themselves seated on the wide stone steps leading down to the marvel of beauty.

Lord Calvan, selecting a prominent, dignified position with Lettie as near him as possible, with that benignant smile, waited for a snap of the camera, while Joyce, not to be outdone, stood on the other side. After they had their pictures taken they dispersed in separate groups. Lettie, standing conversing with Conrad, glanced across to where Joyce stood, talking to a late arrival. He glanced toward her and nodded. Lettie, understanding, went swiftly across to him. As she advanced toward him the stranger left.

"Did you want me, Joyce," she asked.

"I always want you," he said. She smiled.

"Do you know that's strange. But I felt the need of you too, of your mind when I've been thinking along certain lines."

"I'd like to be always within call," he said, "for any need of yours."

"How willing you always are to give, Joyce," she answered, and looked at him with eyes full of friendliest admiration.

"Aren't all men," asked Viola, who had come up

to them, "especially if they see any chance of reward? — Some have *grosse tête et peu de sens.*"

Lettie looked quickly about. "Oh, no! Men are often more generous than women. They respond more quickly to any call upon them."

"Sometimes," quietly said Viola, then added in a low tone, "but there are times we must give them the benefit of the doubt. Time will tell at such times whether they were handicapped or unfair," and she moved away with a knowing glance at Lettie.

Lettie and her companion were left standing alone. Distinctly in a low tone he spoke: "Lettie, don't you know I love you, — that I always loved you? Why will you not let me come into your life?"

She looked straight ahead. "I'm sorry if I've got to tell you or make you at all unhappy." Then she touched his hand a flimsy touch. "I like you so, next to some one else, best of any one I know, but I am *fernie converte* you see."

"What a complex being you are, Lettie, — always have been. You have made your marriage the freest I know. You seem devoted, yet you are hopelessly accountable. Fancy that! But I'm helpless you see, in my love. You believe both in your duty and your freedom — everything."

"Well, and if I do."

"You had that right, but do you know what I think you are? A new woman, not quite impervious, not selfish enough, just in the desultory period with more of the old ideas sticking to you than you realize, Lettie girl," he finished, all his

love speaking in his voice and his eyes as he called her name.

Viola, watching them, saw everything expressed in the telltale love of his features, called out, "Lettie, come see your despoiled garden. Hurry! We're wanted at the booth."

Arriving at the garden they found every flower, bud and blossom and bit of green had been sold. After viewing the almost barren garden they retraced their steps toward the tent. When some distance from the spot they noticed that a crowd had gathered around what looked to them from the distance to be a large, dark, irregular shaped blanket which hung from a rope stretched across from corner to corner of the canvas. Before they could get near enough to get a distinct view of the object Conrad met them with the information that a beautiful bearskin had been sent in to be sold to the highest bidder and that it was as handsome a fur as he ever had seen. To one party Holt demonstrated it and impressed the fact that he got that bear himself. To another Conrad told of his terrible fight for life in which he came out the winner. Joyce wanted to bear the whole thing on his shoulders, but dare not, afraid Lettie would get hold of it and denounce him then and there. It was left to Nettie to show who the real courageous party was.

She looked it all over, then she called out to her mother, "Oh, Mother, what do you think? Uncle Frank's big bear is here, what he killed himself out West. I think it must have broke Uncle Frank's heart to give that up. He prized it most awful." She hung around it. To her mother she said, "I

can't bear to see any of those strange people carry that bear of Uncle Frank's away." They waited until everything else was sold, then started the bidding. Higher and higher went the bids until only Marjorie, Lord Calvan and Lord Bononski and Joe were left to compete in the bidding. "Eighty-five, ninety-five," then silence. "Going once, going twice, going —" "One hundred," called out Joe, and to him it was sold. Proudly Joe came up, paid the amount and walked away with the precious prize. A little figure ran after him.

"Oh, Joe, I am so glad you got Uncle Frank's bear. I was so 'fraid those city people would get it. I just hid myself, then Thelma came and said, "It's all right, Nettie, Joe's bought it, but he'd had it anyway. Would you have got it, Joe, if it had gone up hundreds and hundreds of dollars?"

"You bet my last dollar I would have."

And that night when Nettie knelt to thank her Heavenly Father for filling their coffer that they might start the building she felt something thick and heavy under her knees. The lights had been turned low. She had just begun her prayer. She stopped short. "Excuse me, dear Jesus, until I get up and see what has got into my room." Thelma, standing there listening, turned up the light. Lettie, entering the room at that moment to give her little girl the usual tucking in, saw Nettie standing there looking down at something on the floor. It was the big black bearskin. Nettie dropped on her knees again. "Dear Jesus, it's all right. It's Uncle Frank's bear. Thank you, Jesus, for not letting the city people take it away." Then her usual prayer. And

as her mother tucked her in bed she said, "Mother, it's under your feet, — Uncle Frank's bear. I'm going right over in the morning to tell him it's all right." And as she was just passing into slumberland she murmured, "It's the most beautiful thing in the world, isn't it, Mother, working for God? It makes you feel so happy all over."

The only thing that had marred Nettie's happiness that day was the absence of Uncle Frank from the lawn fête. But if she could have taken a peep down where the boats were conveying the people across, she would have seen him the leader of the whole affair.

Everything had been sold. There seemed to be a great supply of money. If only Lettie and the other wise ones could have seen the camp and its occupants late that night or the next day they could have surmised where the money had been supplied from. There were Indian slippers decorating each bedpost, the size no man among them could boast of ever being able to wear. Some could not even get their big toes in and Conrad could boast not only of these but a half dozen of those love china and wax playthings that every little girl hugs tightly in her arms in the love and play of motherhood; and pies and cakes that those hungry inmates of camp life could not dispose of in a fortnight. But they and the boss knew that the money spent for these articles would add greatly to their building fund and how much they had added to the success of the fair and gladdened the heart of the loved little widow of Lone Man's Ranch. But she did not know how much this man Frank had lent of his presence and his purse to the success of the

affair. Blessed is he who does not let his left hand know what his right hand does! More blessed is he than he who like the Pharisee shouts his offerings from the hilltops, for he who had been the head of these settlers of the Indian reservation who were so eager to obey his every wish and who carried this part of the program to a pleasant and financial success was he who was known as "the boss of the lodge," and to Nettie as "Uncle Frank." The ghost of the past! He whose manly heart and willing hands unseen was doing the best he could to help in the good work for her whom he dared not call his own.

And all those Jacks and Jills, little beggars, as Holt had called them, had not been forgotten. They had been treated and stuffed to their hearts' content. Each loving little mother carried away with her a waxen-faced little doll and each sturdy future lord of the ranch carried away what every boy loves — a toy that made a noise; the louder, the better they liked it.

Two days following the carnival Lettie had asked the committees of the different departments to compare notes and report on their finances. Joyce was the first to arrive and Dick Greene had come in to ask Lettie in regard to the planting of some bulbs and she had taken the opportunity of praising him for his skill in his part of the arrangement of the fête.

"Dick, I have much to thank you for and I am proud of having such a jewel of an overseer on my ranch. I shall have to keep you hid in the future or I shall, I am afraid, be losing you."

"You flatter me too much, Mrs. Merriman. I am afraid I owe too much to you to leave you unless by your own expressed wish."

"That Dick, will never be, but an intelligent man like yourself, I am afraid, will before long be wishing to spread out your wings and fly to a more up-to-date and cultured atmosphere."

"I think not, with such a friend as you to keep me here. It will take years to pay the debt I owe you — perhaps until eternity." And with those words he passed out.

She turned to Joyce. "That man merits all the reward any one can give him."

"Perhaps," sardonically spoke Joyce, "but don't you think, Mrs. Merriman, you put too much stress on that fellow, — I mean in your conversation with him? It seems a little out of place to use flattery in addressing such a crude man."

"But Dick Greene is not crude, he is learned and he uses his knowledge to advantage and in some ways has more polished manners than some men of more social standing. Crude? Why, I cannot see where you see any crudeness in his makeup at all. It is indiscernible to me."

"But not to a man of university learning. We notice such things quickly. They are always plainly discernible to our eyes." He had spoken contemptuously of the man because he was not a "university man."

"I fear I am of a different opinion, Mr. Joyce. While I honor a man who has intelligent thought, through his university learning, and like to associate with such men or women, yet I have seen men

who have not had the advantage of such training compare favorably with those who have had the advantage and have seen them holding high places of honor and respect. No university can make a man. Men may load themselves with lore until they stoop beneath the weight of their accumulations yet fail to lift a care from the heart of the weary or impel a single soul an inch on its way toward heaven. The real building of a man is within —"

"Mr. Prentiss," announced Thelma.

The clergyman greeted them all and they all joined in a general conversation in regard to the success of the fête. Then Conrad came in with Holt and Marjorie and Aunt Fanny were summoned. Conrad was brimming over with the exciting events of the two days before.

"Financial success? Why it ought to have been. And no one can deny it was a social success. Why I never had so much fun as the corral produced. I thought my sides would burst when that Count Van — never mind the name, rode that broncho. He knew how to ride, he did — did not, I'm thinking, and the coin just rolled in. I was sorry when I had to leave the corral."

"But why did you have to leave? That was your part, was it not?" queried Viola.

"Sure, but I had to go and attend to that bear rug, — see to the bidding —"

"Say, Conrad," broke in Holt, "you are immensely out of focus."

They all looked at Holt. Some mystery, thought Viola, and Joe buying that rug for Nettie. I think I understand. Aunt Fanny broke the silence that

followed. With her hands uplifted to emphasize her words she said, "For goodness sake, don't say anything about that corral or horse riding affair. It may have been funny, but I call it a disgraceful part of the affair. If I had had my part in the arrangements that part would have been left out."

"Left out! Why that was the best part of the whole thing," said Conrad.

"You think so," commented Aunt Fanny, "because you were the head of it, for my —"

"We are not here to condemn any proceedings of the day," spoke up Lettie, "but to report all money received at the different booths and departments."

Lettie almost gasped with astonishment at the report of the different committees. She could hardly believe the report of their success to be genuine. Her report came last and she reported her garden to have netted the sum of seventy-five dollars and sixty-five cents.

"And I bet that sixty-five cents came from His Highness, Lord So and So," said Joyce.

"No more comments," ordered Lettie. "This meeting is called for business purposes only."

Then the plans for the building of the institution were taken up. They had enough to start and to make it wise to borrow the rest. Rev. Prentiss spoke of the donation of the ground for the building and expressed a wish to know who the donor was that they could express their gratitude to him.

"And haven't you ever suspected who the party was?" questioned Marjorie.

"Not an inkling of who, whence, or where he came."

"Well, of all the things," ejaculated Aunt Fanny. "It isn't like up our way. Why, if they give anything up there their name is published in the papers, the price exaggerated or otherwise and then most likely posted on the billboard."

This comment brought out laughter. Lettie soon left the room to see about serving the tea. It was a social group that gathered in Mrs. Merriman's dining-room, sipping tea and nibbling at Lettie's home-made cake.

"Wish I had brought you over some pumpkin pie. The boys will never eat them up. Makes some of them sick now even to look at one," said Conrad, not thinking for a moment that some of them would wonder where they got all the pies from.

"You must have some cook up there! Don't he ever give you any other kind of dessert?" asked Marjorie.

"Of course, but you know —" and at a pinch given him from underneath the table by his partner, Holt, he stopped abruptly. "Gee! I've sat on a pin, by the feeling," he added.

"You chump!" said Holt, underneath his breath, and every one wondered why Conrad's face grew so red.

"I should think the pin stuck clean through by the looks of your face. Why, it's as red as Joe's hair," said Viola, who had an idea where the pin came from. Then to Holt, she added in a low voice, "Better put a check line on him before you let him out again."

The candelabra had been lighted long before they had left the dining-room, and as Dick came in to

see if there were further orders for the night or next morning, Mr. Prentiss arose from his chair to give him a cordial greeting. Conrad, not to be outdone, asked about the family.

"How are the little Greenes? Got over their cramming down good things yet?"

"I should think so and now they're beginning to get away with that roast you bought for them, what time they can spare from their new babies. It was very kind of you and they're praising you up all the time to their mother and myself. I don't know but they have named one or two of their new family after you." And smilingly he bade them good-night. They all laughed, even Conrad himself, at the way Dick had given his Good Samaritan deeds away.

"I wondered where all the good things went to," said Lettie, "but I was too busy to investigate and I knew my committee was competent to look after everything and I see my confidence was not misplaced, for I see that they were more capably looked after than I anticipated."

"You will know where to go after this when your finances are low," said Viola to the pastor, with a nod towards Conrad.

"As there is no time better than the present I will, if Mrs. Merriman will get my hat for me, pass it around."

"Don't, I'm dead broke!" expostulated Conrad as he broke for the door.

"No wonder," said Lettie, "I should think you would be and be obliged to put your good clothes in pawn."

As they bade her good-night, Mr. Prentiss held back from the others; Conrad also stood back. They each had something to say in confidence. Mr. Prentiss, seeing Conrad in earnest conversation with Viola, took the chance to bid Lettie good-night, adding, "How is Dick standing out?"

"Splendid. He is one of the ninety and nine."

"I am glad of it. Your seed sown by the wayside seems to be bearing fruits of promise. I only wish there were more like you in this world."

"I fear, Mr. Prentiss, it is not my seed that is producing this abundant crop of good fruit. The seeds I plant seem to be chaff. The wheat is Nettie's."

"As always, laying the best to some one else." And then he bade her good-night.

Lettie reëntering the room, almost collided with Conrad.

"You going so soon, Conrad? Why not tarry a while. The evenings are long at Lone Man's Ranch."

"If I can while away those hours I'll willingly tarry a while. Viola has been giving me a partial inlook into your journey to his majesty's lower regions. I have become interested. Perhaps your ladyship will give me further inlook into this mysterious place."

Lettie gave one of her mirthful laughs. "If you are not in fear of your slumber being disturbed by his Majesty's visit after hearing my report of the journey, I will willingly give you the detail, although Viola is the only one I have rehearsed the occurrence to so far."

Viola and Conrad seated themselves on a divan in a cozy corner of the room, while Nettie sat on the floor, busy cutting out lady paper dolls from the magazine.

"My vision, a dream, has but one point of mystery in it which caused me to take more than a casual interest in it. At the time I was in deep trouble in my inability to decide right from wrong and I believe in some way God had a hand in this dream. At any rate it had a deciding point in my life.

"I seemed to find myself in a cave-like structure. There were rude benches, a number of them, occupying a place between a large empty space and an altar-like platform, back of which and some distance from it a red sheet of flames burst forth. They seemed to issue from the back of tall large rocks. Steps led to the room from between two large, upright slabs of rough granite. The way between looked dark and gloomy. Suddenly from a casket-shaped box in front of the altar issued cries and groans and then as I advanced toward the altar, drawn there by some irresistible force, I saw a form rise up from the box. It was the features of an old man, well known to me in our locality. And here is where the mystery comes in. I did not know at the time of this, my vision of the underworld, that this man was dead. I spoke involuntarily his name, Harris. His reply was, 'Pray! get down and pray, if you don't want to go farther down to the everlastingly hot place,' and with those words he began to pray, to beseech, to implore that he go no further than the first region, purgatory. As I,

in misery and distress at the old man's agony, turned away, I saw enter the place from out that dark passage, between the two granite slabs, two women, both of whom I knew. One was mumbling to herself and seemed to be praying as she took a seat on one of the benches. I recognized her. She was a miserly, ill-tempered creature whom every one in our locality disliked; treating every one with contempt, she hoarded money by the hundreds, stole and pilfered whenever she got a chance. The other woman was one of our pious women on Sunday. Other days she was interested in the social path more than the righteous way. I spoke to this one, wondering why she was there. She seemed in great fear and clasped and unclasped her trembling fingers. 'Why are you here?' I said. 'Because I played the hypocrite. I was pious on Sunday; the rest of the week I forgot my religious training and fought and clambered to climb the social scale. I snubbed my neighbors and only sought those who could or would take me into the society of those on the higher social ladder.'

"Then I heard the other woman say, 'If there isn't old Harris over there!' She tittered as she saw his agony and heard him begging for mercy. I spoke to her. 'I expected you here,' I said, 'but not him.'

"'You here,' she cried, 'You here! And what have you done?'

"'I do not know' I replied, and then I asked the guard who seemed to follow me around, 'Why am I here? I have never sinned as those sinned.'

"'As a warning,' he answered, and said no more.

"I advanced again toward that altar from behind which the fiery flames were now bursting out fiercer than ever, creeping nearer and nearer to the praying soul.

"'Go back!' he called, 'go back!' and then I saw that he was chained.

"'Why are you here?' I called to him.

"'Because I gave short measure. I cheated the poor and the rich alike, but the poor more often, for they did not find me out. I pawned the spoiled goods on them for a fair price and now — and now —' and his voice died off in a groan.

"'And now you are paying the debt for your action,' I finished for him. And there was a loathing in my soul for such a creature as he and then after a while he asked —

"'Why are you here?' I replied, 'I am here as a warning. Why, I do not know. And again I turned in mute appeal to the guard. The guard, shifting his eyes from the floor and looking up at me answered, 'You did wrong, but you did it to help others. Whatever you did wrong you did it to be able to assist those in less favored situations than yourself. You needed warning. You heeded no conscience warning; you stopped at nothing to relieve sufferings of others and then the Great Father called you to purgatory. You will go no further.' I fell on my knees in prayer. How long I had been there I do not know. I was aroused by a touch on the shoulder. I looked up. The guard stood there. 'Are you ready to go?' I tried to ask where, but my trembling lips could not ask the question. Harris cried out, 'Oh, God! If she with

her little sin is to go farther, where will my sinful soul land?' The guard spoke up: 'She has sinned but a little; she has seen, beheld what her doom is if she still persisted in sin. She is to go back to earth to live again.' 'Go back! Go back!' the doomed man cried, 'and shun this accursed place.'

"And then the guard led me toward the stone steps. As I passed the benches I saw the cruel miser of a woman sitting with bowed head. Her lips still moved in prayer. The other woman sat dejected and morose, her attitude more defiant than otherwise at her situation. I saw group by group entering the dark passage. I ascended the steps slowly, one by one, not quite sure of my pardon, and then the guard stood still. I turned to look at him. He waved his hand and then came oblivion. The next I knew I stood on earth in a strange place. On and on I went. I seemed to fly and at last stopped near my own home. For days I never got over that vision, so real, so vivid it was, but to me it was the beginning of a new life."

Conrad rose to go. "Be sure," he said jestingly as he bade her good-night, "not to have any more of those visits to purgatory before I come again, for they might not let you off so easily again."

"Do you mean that my sins of the present may overcome those of the past?" Lettie asked.

"Not by any means. My thought was far different. A beautiful woman like yourself might impress your presence upon his majestic instinct to such a degree that he would make you his prisoner."

"Not unless he wished to make purgatory less of

a terror to the condemned souls," spoke up Viola. And then they both laughed.

"Don't make a jest of it," said Lettie. "I can't see the funny side of it at all. To me it is a warning — a real thing."

CHAPTER XVII

HER REWARD

LETTIE had for a long time been eager to go to the land of the gold fields. It was the only way she could gain the information she sought. The institute building was well on its way and she felt that in that journey to that far country she might be financially benefited, for surely her father had left gold somewhere in that place where he had received his death wound, and that money would aid her in the erection of the building which would mean so much to her in the work for the welfare of her fellowmen. There had been called a meeting for that evening in the parish room of the church in regard to the completion of the institute. When the evening arrived the parish room held its full capacity and there were few seats left when Lettie and Viola arrived. Rev. Mr. Prentiss as chairman first addressed the audience. He was followed by Conrad and others. Then Dick Greene arose. As he addressed the chairman there was a stir and a commotion as they realized who the speaker was.

"You have all had your stories to tell about the old and the young that are living graves, small or large, of the kind of skill and energy and patience that they never had the chance or the courage or the will power inside of them to develop, and there

it stays inside of them undeveloped until they die; and it is more true of all of us, — of you and me, than we have any idea. Now we have visited all the people that the Evening Club (that is what we call ourselves) thought of and could get to see and we have found them all in favor of and most enthusiastic over the proposed building and I believe this building and what it will aim at, will lead down to another step to the big undertaking beneath this move, and that is a place for the unemployed. I do not mean the bumper rider that drops off into our town, but those who come here to make homes and through nature's failure to multiply the seeds they have sown, have had their very souls and hopes seared until there was left nothing but the downward path, and somehow that the road to failure is the easiest way to travel. It is down grade all the way just like a toboggan slide. There are no hills to climb, no bridges to cross. We get a ticket and then let go. There is no striving efforts to reach a place of landing. It's the last hope, man's route, and the no-care goal is soon reached, and these are the men who do not want your charity. It's employment, the way to earn their own living and feel square with the world. Let's not do things for them; let's do things with them. This grand building is going, I believe, to bring us all together, employer and employee, men and women, and then we will look to the higher step and we will take it up together, the job of being a town where there shall be no charity. Let's not any of us have more than our share and then deal out old furniture, magazines and games to the rest. Don't have those

dozen houses, more or less, each keeping aloof and distant on its own side, each handing out old clothes and toys down to the poor; each living his own life of charity and gift giving at Christmas. That isn't being a town; it isn't enough. When we have this building that means so much to most of us, don't let us go on advancing our philanthropies. Instead, as we assemble together, let us talk over the next step; what is to become of us? Let us dream farther than gift giving on up to wages and a great deal farther than that. Let's dream so far that soon we shall add mills and factories to our town and make every one independent and self-supporting and we shall in years turn back to the time when this grand building that we are now watching for its completion was the foundation of the success of our town, for from that we went a step higher and still we keep climbing until we were proud of our town and its people and not a pauper, not a poor family, shall its township boast of or feel the burden of."

He sat down, at first in silence, then there was an outburst of applause which almost shook the frame of the building. As Conrad greeted Lettie and Viola after the meeting, he remarked, "Never was so surprised in my life at Dick. Never thought it in him!"

"I did," quietly said Lettie. "I knew that some day you would hear from that man, and Dick knew what he was talking about. He knew what it was to go on that path of failure and there is another that we will some day hear from. It will be a surprise to some of you but not to me, and that man is

Charles Fermer. Oh, I tell you such men are worth saving, not only such, but every one, and it isn't charity they want, it is wages."

"Well, why don't such men look for wages?" spoke up Joyce.

"They probably do until they get discouraged," quietly replied Lettie.

"By Jove! I like to hear Joyce talk," commented Conrad to Viola as they walked towards home.

"He's not looking very hard for wages, I notice; he's living on his airs until he can capture a bird within a gilded cage and gold-lined nest. Honestly, how such a woman as Mrs. Merriman can endure such a fop hanging around is more than I can understand."

"Don't you worry, he will never get Mrs. Merriman's gilded cage."

"Looks that way now, I should say."

"Looks are sometimes deceiving. I hope you give Mrs. Merriman more credit for tact than that."

Mr. Prentiss joined them at this point and walked the rest of the way with them, discoursing on the address of the evening. Lettie walked with Dick and Charles. As they parted from her, Mrs. Merriman held out her hand to them.

"Good-night," she said; then to Dick, "Thank you for the speech tonight, it will leave its mark on the sands of time if not upon the present. I knew it was in you, Dick."

"Thank you, Mrs. Merriman, but it was you that inspired me. I was speaking for you and your good work and your way of saving people without the resemblance of charity."

Joyce gave a sniff which was twin to a sneer and then he and Lettie walked on for a while in silence until they joined the other group, although he wanted the worst way to tell what he thought of her associating with such company as those flat dwellers, but considered silence the better part of valor. But later that evening he spoke to her in regard to the difference in their stations of life.

"I can't quite understand why you should be obliged to be quite so friendly with those people," he said.

"But I cannot see the wrong in it. I, myself, am living on the bounty of others. Why should —" and then she paused as the thought came to her that she was about to disclose her secret and private affairs.

Joyce wondered at her words and her uncompleted sentence. It kept him absent-minded the rest of the evening. Was she not as well off as he thought? Was she under obligations to others? And he had been trying all these months to get this woman and all that vast estate that he might live on the easy side of life. The next day he wandered up to the ranch. He had a plausible excuse in regard to some work on the new institute building. Viola and Conrad were playing tennis. They asked him to join them and get Hoyt to be his partner. He accepted their invitation although he would much rather at that moment be engaged in a tête-a-tête with Mrs. Merriman, for he was eager to find out the meaning of her words the evening before.

Nettie had been over the fields, had gathered in as pets two green wiggling snakes and was on her

way towards the house when she espied the tennis players and Joyce among them. She never had much love for Joyce, although she had tried to be friendly toward him and live up to that commandment, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," but it didn't seem to go much farther than mere friendship and not that of the lasting kind either, and she had on one of her wicked days, as she called them.

"Hello!" she called out, as she advanced toward the tennis players. "Who wants some fudge?"

"Oh, please," called out Joyce, giving his racquet a fling and holding out his hand expectantly.

Into his hand she put two wiggling green snakes.

"Stop! Quit! Get out!" he yelled, falling all over himself as he tried to get away. Nettie just shouted with glee. The rest came running up to see what had called forth the excitement.

"Why, Nettie Merriman! what in the world ever made you do such a thing?" expostulated Viola.

"I don't care; I don't like him. He's such a flump; makes you think of a big hornet making lots of noise and lettin' the little bees do the real thing."

"But he means well."

"Then why don't he act it? 'Sides, Uncle Frank says he 'sposes some day that man will be my daddy, and I was just trying to show him how ugly I can be so he wouldn't want to be my daddy, and I'll —"

But Viola was holding her hand over Nettie's mouth so Joyce wouldn't hear any more remarks embarrassing to himself and straightway led the wilful little one into the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CONSPIRATORS

AFTER his release Harold Mathews lost no time in tracing his double. In need of funds and disappointed at the loss of Duke, who had been so quickly identified as the titled embezzler of a large sum from his former employer, a proprietor of a large establishment in New York, a couple of years back, Harold resolved to look up the woman he had deserted after convincing her that their marriage was not a legal one. Successful in locating her he finds she still cares for him, and after a plausible story he persuades her to accompany him as a helpmate in his unscruplous deeds.

Emily Mathews did not like the idea of doing any unprincipled work for her husband. That he had been a bad one she knew, but, as he suggested, it was only to get financial assistance for a short time, — just a loan, as he put it. After much urging and persuasion she at last consented to seek employment in Mrs. Merriman's household. A few days later she sought employment at the ranch.

Thelma interceded with Lettie in regard to employing the woman. "She seems respectable and willing to do any kind of housework for low wages," said Thelma. "Perhaps with warm weather coming on we may need more help."

"I will see the woman, send her in," said Lettie.

As the woman entered, her features seemed familiar to Lettie and her thoughts wandered to the time or place where she had seen that face before. Questioning the woman as to her former position or last place of employment, the woman's answers did not give any enlightenment as to whether or not they had met before. That she had come from New York to Canada seeking employment, — that much she acknowledged. After a few minutes of silence Lettie spoke.

"If you wish employment at once, I think I can give you a position here, for a time at least."

"I feel thankful to you, as I need a situation at once."

As she was known only as Emily and was quiet and reserved, as Lettie grew to know her she placed much confidence in her and allowed her many liberties in her home, leaving the care of her personal effects in her hands, such as looking after her mail, tidying up her room. One thing only annoyed Lettie: that was Nettie's dislike for the woman and openly letting it be known.

"Nettie, I can't understand why you dislike Emily when as a general course you are lovable to everybody else."

"It is those eyes of hers. She has snake eyes."

"But I can't see it. Her face has an honest, good look. It is as open as a book; she cannot help her eyes."

"I s'pose not, but I'm sure that God never put snake eyes in any good face, 'sides, I'm 'spicious of her," and no reason could convince Nettie otherwise.

Lettie for some time had not been receiving her usual quarterly allowance; she felt that she must do something to relieve her financial condition and firmly decided to go to Australia to find, if possible, the secret hiding-place of her father's treasure. As she informed Viola: "As far as I'm concerned, I could get along on what the ranch produces, but there's Nettie's future to think of. Besides, I have pledged out that which I feel compelled to meet. I am sure now that Howard Mathews is not on this earth, or if so, he no longer cares to look after my support."

"I myself have begun to think that Mathews has met his fate in some way. In all possibility he has been put away by enemies of the government under the excuse of being a spy," said Viola.

"I am certain of it," said Lettie, "and I must make this journey if only to convince myself that there is no possibility of ever securing the treasure left by my father. I shall feel, anyway, that I have done my duty; I am glad that I have such a good handy woman as Emily to leave with you as a companion, for I have great confidence in her."

Emily had certainly won a place in Lettie's confidence and before long she knew Lettie's story, for she had confided in her that at any time she might be compelled to give up the ranch as the deed was in Howard Mathews' name and she had only the lease of it until she could get her divorce, which she had never done, and if proof of this should become known to his relatives and they so wished, she would have to leave the place.

That night Emily met her husband at their usual

secret meeting place and declined to keep the quarterly allowance from Lettie any longer.

"I cannot possibly think of robbing this woman any more."

"Why not, Emily? I shall pay it back soon, even before she misses it. Don't you want to see me get ahead and make something of myself? Or shall I sink back into worthlessness again? You hold the situation in your hands, Emily. What shall I do, stay here with you and the kid or go back to my old life again?"

"I want you to stay, Harold; stay with me and the boy, but I can't stand the robbing of this woman. Oh, Harold, how much longer is this to go on?"

"Just another quarterly allowance and I'll let you off. By that time I'll have the invention completed and off my hands. And just think of the lady you will be and the comforts our boy will have and you will know how you have helped me to do it all. Now, dear little woman, keep up your nerve just a little while longer."

And then Emily told him what Lettie had told her; of the marriage and the lease and Lettie's fear of the result.

"By jove! That is just what I want. It is a high hand but I guess I can play it."

"What do you mean, Harold? What do you intend to do?"

"Live in clover, Emily. By jove! I've got to get that. Did she tell you any name?"

"Only her father's. No other man's name was mentioned. She is going to Australia to get some gold left there by some one."

"Who was her father?"

"His name was Armstrong."

"Good! When is she to go?"

"In a month's time."

"Well, see she goes and then I will attend to him."

"Oh, Harold, who are you going to attend to?"

"Her husband. He is a bad one. You do just as I tell you and we will look after the woman all right afterward."

"I will be so glad, Harold, if we can do something for her and will not have to rob her any more, for I will not touch another penny that belongs to her. And you will give back all that I have taken?"

"Yes, I'll do the square thing. You go back and rest your mind. We'll settle this right away."

Emily went back with a lighter heart than she had had for months and did not touch the next allowance.

The day after Lettie's quarterly allowance was due Emily met her husband at their usual trysting place. He had another plot for her to take part in; that she represent herself as the ranch owner's wife, he himself to show up at the opportune moment.

"I refuse to go any farther in this game. I have done the last wrong I will ever do to this woman."

"You're a nice wife! Where's the money for this month?"

"Safe where it should be."

"You don't mean you lost your nerve!"

"No, I never had any nerve. If I had I would never have consented to stand by or do any work for a rascal like you. This woman in her noble way

has shown me what a vile creature I am, living on her bounty and repaying her by disloyalty."

"You're a dandy bird, you are? Where am I to get the money to support myself? You don't think I can live on air, do you? I've got to have money to call this thing off. You've got to think for the boy. This babbling about living on her, — why, you have as much right to live there as she has. It belongs to you as much as to her. Do right by me and you will be mistress there some day."

"Do right by you is to do wrong to her. No, I am through. If it is all the love you have for me to make me a partner in crime, then I shall do without your love."

"Do be sensible."

"That's just what I am going to be, sensible,— for the first time since I met you. I'm going to get out of this thing at once."

She turned to leave him. He tried to stop her but she eluded him. Back she hastened, gathered up her apparel and in the blackness of the night went back to her boy, resolved to begin a new life and banish from her future all thoughts of the man who had not proved himself worthy of her love and trust.

In the days that passed no Emily returned and Lettie began to think that Nettie was right in the characterizing of her.

On the day that Lettie was busy packing for her journey to Australia Viola entered the room with a note.

"You might be interested in the note which I found behind the dresser in our former maid's room,

who disappeared so suddenly. It having been addressed to you I thought it best to hand it over."

Lettie took the note and eagerly scanned its contents.

MRS. MERRIMAN:

I am leaving your service abruptly. I see no other course to pursue. My warning to you is to take kindly to no information of your husband given by others, unless you are sure of facts. If your husband is dead then others are representing him alive to gain from you what you received from him. For the sake of my boy I must keep silent, but believe me, I shall always remain true to your memory. I never knew your husband.

Yours,

EMILY.

The note was a perplexing mystery to Lettie. As she tried to unravel the mysterious meaning of it she became convinced that Howard Mathews' relations were trying to regain from her Lone Man's Ranch, which had only been given to her as a lease until she should free herself from the bond of matrimony; and in all this time she had not been able to prove that he was dead nor had she earnestly tried to get her legal freedom.

CHAPTER XIX

THE HIDDEN TREASURE

CONSTERNATION and admiration had stirred the camp of indolent gypsies. Sitting at the center of the circle was an old white-bearded, hoary-headed man whom they called the Gypsy King and who always ordered their return after their yearly trip to this, their annual camping place. He watched with a critical eye the beautiful English lady. She was to him like one risen from the dead and it was to him she went for information. He was the oldest of the band. He must know, if any one did. But to all questions he shook his head. There was a dark, handsome young gypsy matron who took a great liking to the beautiful mademoiselle and her sleeping wagon had been offered to the English lady. It was the handsomest of them all, its beautiful tinted windows draped by lace curtains, the handiwork of the young matron herself. The bed was a great billowy nest and the bed itself was the brightest of brass.

In secret, when they were alone, she told mademoiselle, "That the old man, Allio, could tell her ladyship everything. He is a half demented, gold-crazed and liquor-fed gypsy who had been driven from the camp on account of his shiftless habits and had built himself a shack upon the hill where he spent his time in searching for gold, but, if offered

a few coins, he perhaps could tell her what she was seeking to know. One of the young men would go as a guide."

Lettie accepted the proffered aid and with the guide and Joyce, Lettie felt safe because they had said the old man was harmless. After a walk of about a mile over rough ground they reached the cabin, or shack, for it was a loosely put up affair where air could find plenty of space to enter. As they reached the shack the guide called: "Come out here. There's an English lady here wants to see ye."

A shaggy, unkempt creature in the shape of man emerged from the shack. He gave a staring, startled look at Lettie, then he advanced closer, shading his eyes with his hands. His lips moved in almost inaudible words. "It's she come back again!" and then stood at attention, waiting for them to make their errand known.

"This is the man, Allio, yer wanted to see," spoke up the guide. "Yer can tell him now what ye want. Fire ahead!"

Lettie hesitated a moment as though studying the exact words to use. Clutching the sleeve of Joyce's coat as though to steady herself, for the sight of this unkempt creature had for the moment unnerved her. Hesitatingly she spoke, "I want to get some articles belonging to a gentleman that was here some years ago and who was wounded in Australia near where there was gold. He wore a canvas or tan hunting coat. I wish to get some papers that were in the pocket. And there were other things I wanted to inquire about that I thought

you might know about. But if you would get the coat or papers, if you know where they are, that will do for the present."

"Want the coat, does yer? Come on, I'll show yer," and he chuckled with glee.

Lettie hesitated, as she felt some misgiving in venturing farther into the forest.

"He won't hurt you, lady. It's drink ails him and he ain't seeing fine ladies every day. It riled him a bit," the guide said.

Thus reassured, she nerved herself to go on. Besides, she had come too long a journey to go back without her request being rewarded.

When near a deep row of tangled underbrush, he commanded them to stay there and pushing his way through what looked to the others like an impenetrable tangle of briars and brush, soon emerged with a coat under his arms. She eagerly held out her hands for it, but he refused to relinquish the garment.

"He wants coin for it," said the guide.

Lettie took out her purse and taking some coins offered them to him. He shook his head.

"Take it, you blackguard, or I'll make yer," the guide said.

He threw the coat at them. The guide picked it up and handed it to her. With trembling hands she searched the pockets.

"You are sure this is the coat belonging to a man by the name of Armstrong? I find no papers."

He pointed to a hole in the coat where the bullet had left its mark, then he hobbled toward her.

"That's where I hit him," and he patted it lov-

ingly. "I gitted him that time. He took her, the wild bird, and put her into a cage. He killed her, he did and I — why, I killed him."

"Git those papers the lady is looking for, do yer hear?" commanded the guide.

From under his coat he brought forth a package.

"Papers in it yer want? They come high, my lady. It takes gold, — yes, gold only, buys it."

"You'll have to hand over some more coin, I'm thinkin'," and the guide's eyes glistened as he saw she was well provided with it.

Joyce touched her arm, saying, "I'm thinking we'd better get through as soon as we can with the old fellow. I don't like his actions. Better let things go. If he won't give up the papers, get some higher authority to act."

"No, I have come too far to get facts in regard to my father's possession to let this chance pass." She spoke in a firm tone, although she was trembling inwardly with fear.

"I will give you this if you will first let me see the contents of those papers, that I may assure myself that they once belonged to my father." And she held out some coins to him. Allio took the gold, as he called it, and in her hand lay the package she had traveled so many miles to get, worth to her more than richest treasures. Feeling eager to get rid of the old miser's presence she suggested to the guide to return to the camp. Allio for the first time became aware that the papers which he could not decipher had some value and his crafty mind conceived plans to get them back again. Lettie was in haste to scan the contents of the scrip and as soon

as they reached camp she proceeded to read its contents, which showed her where the treasure had been hidden. Calling Joyce to her she handed the paper to him and together they tried to trace the crudely drawn lines that told them where to find the secret hiding-spot. That night Olaf slept outside in a tent near to Lettie's sleeping quarters, but to Lettie there came no sleep until the wee sma' hours of morning, for she was trying to follow through her mind those lines, drawn by her father — through the wilderness she had traveled that morning — to locate the riches which her father had desired they, his children, should locate and share.

The next morning Lettie, unrefreshed by her sleepless night, prepared to go with Joyce and the guide to follow the outlines traced by her father, and, as she surmised, they led them to the forest beyond Allio's shanty. Under rocks, under stumps they searched without success. After hours of fruitless search Lettie, determined and persevering, spread the map on the ground before her, diligently studying the tracing. The men kept on searching every suitable and unsuitable spot where a treasure could have been hidden. Foot by foot they searched until they had wandered far from where Lettie, absorbed in her deep study, did not notice the figure stealthily creeping nearer and nearer, until aroused by a low voice speaking to her.

"Do ye want the gold, lady?"

In a strange voice she answered him, "Yes. Do you know where it is?"

"Come with me, I will show yer — hasten, lady."

Lettie, looking eagerly around for Joyce and the guide, not locating them, started to call them.

"Stop that, lady. No gold will I give yer if they two come."

"But they two must come," she said.

"No," Allio spoke. "You must come now and alone for the father told, 'No man shall touch but she of the golden hair. She alone shall touch the gold.'"

"But you slew him. Only yesterday you told me so. Why should he speak to you what you have said?"

"Once I was his friend until I knew it was he who robbed me of she whom I loved. Then I hate him. But you — you shall have it and it lies but a little way off, my lady. I give it to you — you only, my lady."

In joy, in tremor, she followed him through the tangled underbrush to the door of the cabin. At the door she hesitated. He pushed her through, bolting the door, and then fear took possession of her.

"Aha, my pretty one, your sweetheart don't come. Ye didn't think I hid the hate all these many days, and you're mine again. I'll strangle yer, I'll torture yer as you've tortured my heart when you left me with a fine young Englishman."

He certainly was insane. She was alone at the mercy of a maniac. She must appeal to him through what goodness still was imbedded in that old, shriveled frame of his. Had Joyce met with a tragic fate? Why had not the guide and Joyce missed her? was her thought. She tried to play

the part of sharing his affection. She coaxed him. She interceded with him for fair play, but he laughed at her, he scorned her. Then when he had exhausted this by-play he crushed her within his arms. She called for help and struggled to escape from him. He threw her from him and then he danced around her, calling her his love and his own. He took a bag of gold from under the earthen floor of his cabin. He held it before her and laughed with glee as he told her he had saved it to buy her back from her English lover. And now she was his, his alone, and then in the midst of his frenzied madness he stopped to listen. His keen ear had caught the sound of a shot. She too heard it with a thought and hope that help was near; her overtaxed strength gave way in a deep swoon. The maniac grabbed his knife from his belt and raising her inanimate form, holding it closely to him, again listened. He heard the heavy tread of footsteps. Some one was coming, but they should never take her from him. He would fight for her whom he had waited and slaved for so many and many a day.

CHAPTER XX

THE JOURNEY

"BUT why this journey, Martin?"

"I think it must be something connected with her mother's past, as Thelma tells me it's on account of something like that."

"She's hard up, I'm thinkin', for she's after her father's gold besides."

"But there's no reason of that, Martin. She's provided for. I saw to that before —" For a moment he paused at the thought of disclosing his own secret life. "Why hazard her life for such a trip? Gold fields are haunted by unscrupulous men."

"I don't know as to that, sir. But she's determined to go."

"Then I go too, but not a single word to any one, Martin."

"No, sir, but you are sure to take some one with you, I'm athinkin', sir."

"I thought of Conrad."

Lettie and Joyce had not been alone on their journey. They had as company, unknown to them, neighbors from their own estate. One who, as was his right, watched and kept guard over her. On this day that she had gone to the maniac's cabin, he and his companion had followed unknown, keeping well hid in the underbrush.

"Keep close to the woods, Conrad," ordered Frank. "The old maniac appears to be leading her to some secluded spot. I have an idea the guide can be trusted, but that scamp Joyce would run for his life if anything unusual should occur. Those slim sticks of his are shaking already. He's as limp as a rag. Can't get any nearer to them without being seen. Don't give a loud breath, Frank, the old fellow is on his guard. He is peering around."

Farther into the brush they wandered.

"These darned tangles of briars and shrubs have hindered us. Thought we would never find our way out," spoke up Conrad.

On they wandered until they found themselves on the edge of the woods again. Conrad turned around, "I don't see a sign of them anywhere, do you?"

"Hark! what was that?"

They listened. Again the word came: "Help!"

"It's a cry for help! Good God! Conrad, it's her voice!"

Through the brush they ran. Suddenly Conrad tripped and fell. A shot rang out. He had caught the hammer of his gun as he fell. Springing to his feet again he tried to catch up with Frank, who was far ahead. Across a clear space they ran, up to the cabin from whence not a sound issued.

"Frank," called out Conrad, "be careful. You are up against a desperate man, perhaps more than one, and you must remember that a live man will be of more help to her than a dead one. Just wait until I creep around to the window and see how the land lies. Queer no one is around, not even the

guide." He hastened to the side of the cabin. Almost instantly he was back again.

"She's in there, either dead or unconscious. He's crouching down waiting for you at the door."

"I'm going in, I'll take my chances."

"Then I'll go and get in through the window," said Conrad.

It took but a minute to send the crumbling door crashing to the floor. As it caved in Allio jumped back, still holding Lettie's inanimate form in his arms. As Frank sprang towards him he let the burden fall and, like a tiger at bay, faced the intruder. Frank's athletic training stood him in good service; he had no mere man to buck up against, but a maniac. Conrad at that moment had gained entrance through the window and sprang to his companion's assistance, but not before Frank had been wounded. As Frank fell back, Conrad raised his gun and dealt the maniac a terrific blow. As the maniac fell in a crumpled heap to the floor Frank cried out, "See if she lives. Get her out into the air."

Conrad saw, although unconscious she still breathed. He picked her up and carried her out. As he laid her down outside in the open air, Frank staggered out.

"Get some water, quick! There must be some here somewhere," he cried out, as he tried to stand in an upright position.

Conrad hastened to get the water and soon returned with his hat filled, with which he bathed Lettie's face. She slowly opened her eyes and again she saw that face so set and white, as she had seen

it that night at the window. And again he had come for her from the great beyond. With a cry of anguish she relapsed once more into unconsciousness. Frank saw the blood stains on her garments, unaware that it was not hers but his own life-blood that was dyeing her clothes crimson. He called her name, "Lettie!" and then he fell forward prostrate across her inanimate form.

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The guide had offered a favorable excuse for the strangers' absence and his return without them, but there was one among that band who looked with suspicion upon his tale. Unobserved, she stealthily left the camp on a run for the old man's den. She reached there as Frank fell prostrate across Lettie's form. As Conrad bent over, trying to raise him, Olaf touched his arm. He looked up, startled. So quietly had she come he had not known of her presence.

"Leave mademoiselle to me. Take care of thy friend; he appears to be wounded."

As Conrad hesitated, she said, "Believe me, I am mademoiselle's friend. I share my sleeping quarters with her."

All the time she was speaking she was examining the stained portion of Lettie's garments.

"She is not hurt," she said, "only unconscious. There are marks upon her throat. To my belief she was strangled."

Conrad was trying to stop the flow of blood from the wound which Frank had received when Olaf pushed him aside.

"I know the better way," she said. She stripped

a piece of cloth from her undergarment. She tied it firm below the wound, then another strip above, then with her teeth she frayed out another and plugged the wound. Noticing Conrad standing by she ordered him, "Go at once to the lumber camp above, from whence I take it you come hence and get some one to go for a healer and bring back aid here to bring thy friend to his quarters at once. I will look after both while thee goes."

As he hesitated as in doubt, she stood up straight as an arrow, looking him in the face, said: "You do not trust me. I am your friend; believe me, Monsieur, and I can take care of thy friend."

She drew from beneath her bodice a revolver. "If not, this I can use, Monsieur."

"I will go," he answered.

"Then go, hasten! Thy friend's wound is a bad one. Mademoiselle is much better off than he, the bimbo."

With hastening steps he started toward the lumber camp, but suddenly the clear ring of axes tells him help lies much nearer.

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Lettie opens her eyes to find herself lying in the gypsy's van. The bed is like the softest down. She sees strange faces around her, all but pretty Olaf who has been so kind to her. Olaf raises her up and piles the pillows back of her so she can look out. She sees the faces of two Englishmen dressed in lumbermen's clothes, in deep conversation with the swarthy-skinned and hoary-haired gypsy chief.

"Monsieur," he is saying, "we never considered him violent. It must have been the sight of

Mademoiselle, who is the exact likeness of Princess Ophilla, who, according to our customs, had been given Allio as his wife when in her childhood and who ran away with an Englishman. The sight of gold always makes him worse, for he was always hoarding it to buy his princess back. Drink and his miserly ways made him half crazy, but he was never violent before. It must have been the sight of her and the gold that turned him into a maniac."

She turned wearily on her pillow. Then it was her mother that was the gypsy girl and her father had met his death at this man's hands or from another of the band as he, the maniac, had tried to kill her. In the days to come she won the friendship of Phisto and asked him if there had been anything of her mother to identify her parentage in that way.

"I know about your mother as a child; how she was stolen from the fine Lord and Lady; how she was taken to the Gypsy Queen, who was childless; how her skin and hair was colored with the stain from the walnut bark, that she should never be known or found; but the great blood would tell. She would not have Allio for a husband. She spurned him, but he was loyal to her, loving her with a deep love that could not be shaken. She tried to learn from papers left by people who visited our camp, but she was always watched and guarded. I had learning myself and I tried to help her and brought books to her. Allio would not learn; he was a regular wild bird, but with the tenderest of hearts, and when the Englishman came and she nursed him through a fever illness she never hinted

a thing; but I knew and I saw that she loved the Englishman. And many a time when she tried to get away to meet her lover I found the way, unknown to her, to get the others' attention called away and I shared their great joy with them. But she never knew, poor wild bird! longing to be free from her uncongenial life. Well I remember the day the queen mother died and the girl, being the only kin-child, as by our people's laws, the one selected to put all jewelry belonging to the queen on the queen's body as she was known to wear them in life. I saw her as she entered the funeral tent and placed the earrings in the queen's ears, the other jewelry in their places. As she was placing the rope of beads around the queen mother's neck she seemed to take particular notice of a small chain attached to which was a locket and a tiny gold ring on which was an engraving. As I came into the tent she stood with it in her hand. I saw she was deep in memory. I saw the tiny chain in her hand. I knew then that something in the past had come to her. I heard others coming. I went to her quickly but quietly and took the trinket from out her hand and put it in the bosom of my shirt. She was about to plead for its return when I cautioned her to silence. The others entered. She and I left. I told her I would keep the trinket until she went away, for I felt sure that in time she would go, but when she did go she went without my knowledge. When you came I knew you were a part of her. Had your hair been colored with the walnut dye the resemblance would have been complete. I was a fool to let you go up to Allio but I thought your English friend and the

guide would protect you, but the guide proved a traitor. No man in this country who loafs, stops at the sight of gold. Many a man in years back has lost his life for a handful of gold and your English friend —" and the old gypsy shook his head.

"Wasn't it grand of him? And just think! I owe my life to him and Olaf."

"I do not know, mademoiselle, those Englishmen, but I thought there were others. Olaf says it was a friend and a companion she found there."

He slowly unbuttoned his dark blue shirt and she saw tied to a leather thong a small leather bag. He took it from his neck and slowly untied the bag. He took from it a small chain with a locket and a tiny ring was attached to it.

"This was what was around the stolen child's neck and which I took from her that day inside the bier tent. I always kept it hoping some time to see her again, but she never came. I know not where she went."

He handed it to Lettie. On the ring was a tiny crest. She opened the locket with difficulty. "A picture of Nettie," she could have said, but she knew it belonged to the years past. She looked lovingly at it. "It is, I think, my mother, for it looks as I did when I was that age and I have a little one at home who bears an exact resemblance to this picture."

"It is yours, my Ladyship. The years are fast passing. I shall soon go to join the others. I have performed my task: to give back this memento to those to whom it rightfully belongs."

Lettie clasped the cherished treasure to her breast.

The souvenir of her mother's girlhood, — that clue to her ancestry. He had been kind to her, the gypsy chief, and so she tells him of her father's hidden gold; his being brought home; and his death before he could give them the details. The gypsy chief, as she told him her story, seems to follow her as in a dream, his head bowed, his eyes fixed on the ground. As she finishes he raises his head.

"I know naught of the gold. Many an Englishman lost his life in that mad rush for gold. If the father was carried back to his country, he must have had friends. Many a man lay in a hidden grave as he had fallen by the death blow from his murderer," and the old chief shook his head as he added: "Allio has much gold for which he pays no price, except I believe that of blood on his soul. Perhaps Allio knows of the gold."

After days of fruitless search and the return of Joyce, battered and bruised, who convinced Lettie of his heroic endeavor to save her, and his injury as the result of so doing, but which did not impress Olaf with its truthfulness, Lettie determined to leave for the East, leaving Joyce to complete the search, a proposition which he was reluctant to accept. The thought of the bird in the gilded cage prompted him to consent to the arrangement. The day before her departure from the camp he had approached her on the subject of his love for her. Lettie had been gently gracious to him for his supposed rescue of her from a maniac. That evening she was sitting on a log, resting her elbows on her knees, with her face resting between her palms. She arose quickly, cutting short his impulsive speech. "I —

I hate to go inside my lady's boudoir," she said. "It is hot and lonely inside, but I must — unless you will agree to talk about something else." She spoke lightly, but her laugh had a note of agitation. He sprang from his seat and confronted her.

"Sit down," he begged, "for I'm going to talk about you tonight because I must, for I can no longer be a passive cipher, waiting for things to happen. I know I should not have spoken to you again of my love, but there is a force stronger than my will which draws me on."

"But you are mad to tell me this," she said, "and I am mad to listen. Do you think that I have no conscience? I am not sure that I am free. How do I know —?"

He rose and stood beside her. "Yes, we are both mad," he answered, "therefore impervious to anything which conscience may say. I'm not going to ask for much, Lettie, only that you won't pretend with me. If there is something for both of us to reckon with, the only thing is to — face it."

"I am no ordinary tempter. I did not willingly let myself love you," she said.

He sprang toward her. "You do feel it! You acknowledge it, Lettie?" he begged. "No, don't be afraid," he cried, as she shrank from him. "I'm not going to kiss Howard Mathews' wife."

"Then you know?" she asked. "Then don't imagine that it is Howard Mathews' wife that is in love with you. It is something within me, a flood that sweeps me at times, that even with the kindling of love within me for Mathews cannot chain. Perhaps it's because I am a woman longing for

some strong man to lean upon, for that same man to be conscious of the fact. Until I know how and where I stand what can we two possibly be to each other?"

"I shall ask nothing of you," he promised with slow emphasis. "Nothing until all facts in the case are proved satisfactorily to your full freedom. All I want is the right to dream of you, knowing all the while that you think of me. I want the assurance that you love me, Lettie, that when the time comes of your assured freedom, you will be mine."

"Can a woman love two men at the same time?" she asked. "You know that all the real affection in my heart belongs to my husband. Every atom of goodness in my nature, if there is an atom — goes out to him in gratitude — in marriage love. You can't understand this perhaps —"

"I can — I do understand it," he responded quickly, "and I know also that this lonesome solitude, this watching, waiting, will bring to you no refuge, no haven. There stands nothing between us and the grave. Howard Mathews has met his fate as a —"

"Don't!" she cried, "don't speak that word. I cannot bring myself to believe he was that, not that, whatever his follies in the past may have been."

"Don't be afraid of me, dear, I'm not going to say anything more that will hurt you or that will change your attitude toward me, not even try to prove my worthiness of you. If it is your command and wish we'll drop the subject that lies between us. But we must face the situation and find the facts that there may be no chance of our being kept

apart unduly. There is something that draws us together —"

"I like you caring for me," she confessed, "But —"

He stopped her words, coming very close — so close that her golden hair was a gorgeous mist before his eyes.

"Say that you will be mine," he pleaded.

"I can't say that, Joyce. I know I owe my life to you — Oh, that horrible maniac!" and she covered her face with her hands to shut out that awful vision. "But that — just that — I love you, — I can't, because I didn't love him, not at first. I just cared. But after he had gone I learned to care for him more and more until I think I did love him. This time I may learn the same lesson over again, but — but for the time being, Joyce, until I am sure nothing but the grave stands between you and I, let that which I have felt all along suffice, the deepest of friendship, for I can love but one man, even when that love came too late. You must understand this, Joyce, even if you have to wait time immeasurable for your reward, and it may be on your return I shall be waiting ready to pay in full."

He laid one hand tenderly upon her hair and drew her toward him. Instantly she shrank from him. "No — don't shrink from me like that. I'm not going to ask you to desert your husband for me, only to come if you are free."

"If I am free that is all I shall have to bring with me. I have nothing else to bring as my dower. Good-bye, Joyce," and she had gone.

The thought of the bird in the gilded cage had prompted him to seek her out, but the thought that

"I have nothing else as my dower" mystified and perplexed him. It was the gilded cage he was after more than the beautiful bird, but the combination was nothing to be despised. He intended to follow her home as soon as he could prudently do so, for his finances were considerably low and something had to be done as soon as possible to replenish his fortune. Joyce was in no mood to seek repose that night and it was with a dejected and remorseful countenance that early next day he saw Lettie en route for her homeward journey.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TREASURE FOUND

"BETTER this morning, Frank, I see. Ready to be up and doing? Better wait a few days or you'll have that wound of yours breaking out again."

"I'll stand against that. I'm eager to be up and out. Did you hear from her?"

"Yes, she's getting ready to break camp and go back with her charming young prince that saved her life."

"Did that coward let her think that? Well, I'd dearly love to get hold of him and give him something from the end where the shoe pinches. But she would wonder how I came here and say I followed her and most likely give me the cold shoulder and marry that scamp."

"Aha! so it's a case of Cupid's darts in your case is it, old boy?"

"Call it what you like, but I've got the right and he hasn't."

"Say that again and say it slow, will you, Frank, until I get your meaning through this cobweb cranium of mine."

"You go to thunder! Come and help me get my clothes on."

"Going back to Canada, I suppose, on the next boat."

"Not I, for I intend to land some of that gold that blackguard has hidden. You're sure you saw him having gold?"

"You bet I did! But if you're going to stay here and let that dude snatch up the widow with his plausible story I'll be hanged if I don't go after her and tell her the truth, — how he lay by while you and I did the job. No, I won't mention your name either; I'll take the merit all on my own shoulders and capture the widow myself."

"And give the whole thing away? No, you don't. With Nettie keeping Viola for you as she promised, you'll stay here until I get ready to go or my name will be Mike for short."

"Don't try it. Gee, man! If you only knew how you look: fit for a hospital, instead of a wrestling match. If you should glance into a mirror, you'd pinch yourself to see if you were alive or not. I'm off."

"Where to?"

"To telephone to an undertaker to meet us if we land."

"Stop your joking and help me out of this infernal box of a cabin. How can you expect to see me look otherwise than as a ghost after being shut up here so long?"

A couple of weeks of outdoor life soon began to bring back to Frank his rugged looks and health. They had in the meantime found a bag of gold hidden in the old shack. But there must be more somewhere, from the tales told of the maniac's hoarding and from what the lumbermen had learned of the camp. There was stolen gold somewhere

else. Under large rocks, even in the caves they dug. Then they thought of that tangled underbrush where they lost sight of Lettie and the others on that day, which nearly resulted in more than one tragedy. They searched the underbrush for weeks with no results. The leaves were fast falling and they knew that they must work diligently if their search was to be rewarded before winter came on, for they must leave for home before the cold weather set in, for the boys would want to be leaving for their regular occupations and they must all be together when camp broke up. They had about given up the search, thinking the secret place of the hidden gold would never be revealed and Conrad had expressed the wish that he had gotten the secret out of the old fellow before he sent him to his reward.

"Suppose we rake the ground over?"

"Don't think it will do any good."

"Well, why not try it? It's our last resort."

"All right, go ahead," said Conrad, for any suggestion suited him that would keep them there longer, for he had formed a strong friendship for pretty Olaf. When he was needed the most, he could not be found and the excuse that he was searching somewhere did not always appease Frank.

They raked the leaves around a large space. They cut with a brush hook the tangled rope of bushes, but not until they had almost given up in despair did Mathews see what looked like a break in the hard layer of the earth. He, thinking it would lead to disappointment as all the similar broken places

had, went to work to dig it with little zeal. Lo! there was an opening, and putting his arm in he brought forth a leather bag. He almost shouted with joy as he called out to Conrad. Another, and still another, he pulled out until there were seven dirty bags. As he drew the last one out he observed Conrad scanning an inscription on a bag.

"Say, I'm thinking these belong to some one else. As near as I can make out, there's a name on this bag. W O are two of the letters, — A R M — I can't make out the next letter, but the next ones are T R O N G."

Frank sprang to his feet. "Give me that bag!" he demanded.

With surprised alertness Conrad handed it over. "What's struck you now?" he asked. But Mathews was busy studying the lettering.

"By Jove! it's hers! It's his name!"

"Will you please tell me who 'her' means? I'd like a share in this mystifying atmosphere myself, if you care to shove off a little information, by the way."

"Lettie Armstrong's father! He was shot out in Australia while trying to get out with the gold he had cleaned up."

"And who is Lettie Armstrong? Have I the pleasure of her acquaintance, or will you have to introduce me to her?"

"Mrs. Merriman, you idiot!"

"Thanks for your compliment, old fellow, but I do not feel deserving of it. How was I to know Lettie Armstrong was Mrs. Merriman? I am sure I never made her acquaintance on the cradle roll."

After the first outbreak of joy at finding the gold Frank seemed to grow morose.

"Any one would think you had fallen into a mudhole instead of a gold mine," at last said Conrad, exasperated at Frank's attitude.

"I've been thinking a lot for the last few minutes."

"Thinking what? How to put me out of the way so you can have the whole thing? If that's it, for goodness' sake take the whole mess and beat it. Don't have murder on your soul. The golden lure has stained enough already by it."

"That's it; just what I was thinking. Not with a murderous thought tainting my soul or mind, but this money is tainted enough without it blasting all my future life and hopes. If I was sure it would do that I would be tempted to bury it again."

"Why, I thought it would be the making of you. All I can make out, there's another explanation you owe me."

"If I thought you could keep a secret I'd bare the whole affair to you."

"What do you take me for? A woman?"

"No, but could you keep this thing a secret?"

"Try me and see."

"Well, this Mrs. Merriman that was Lettie Armstrong, to whom four of these bags legally belong, who is believed to be a widow, is my legal wife."

"By Jove, the man's mad!" thought Conrad.

"But she's my wife in name only. If I give her this gold it will make her independent of me. At present she is living on my hospitality. This gold would leave her free and she would probably marry Joyce."

"What came between you?"

"I have only her word and a letter. But I think she found at the last moment that she loved Joyce."

"And we all thought you a woman-hater!"

"That was a bluff to keep Viola Minor and Mrs. Merriman herself from seeing and recognizing me. But I couldn't keep away and when I heard there was a little one I had to be sure that she was still my legal wife."

"And the kid is —"

"No. She was my wife in name only. I thought she had secured a divorce and married Joyce until I came to the lodge and found out her name was Merriman and then Nettie told me a story of a motherless babe and I put two and two together and it made four. And now how to get this money to her and not spoil my own life is what I'm up against."

"Get a lawyer to send her so much a month. Oh, you chump! Carrying a load around like that with such an easy way to get out of it! The thing that bothers me is how are we going to get home with the gold? We will be watched if we try to leave Australia. And then we have the custom officers to face. Remember we are not in the United States and if these gold seekers of gypsies get hold of our having nuggets it's all up with us. And if we undertake to change it to money we might as well throw up our hands."

"Never thought about that. Yours is a level head, Conrad, I must say."

"I've got it! Say, how about your aeroplane?"

"Didn't bring it with me."

"Well suppose you go and bring it. I'll stay here, then we can put our nuggets in and defy custom officers, dead sure shots and all."

"And where will you and the gold be by the time I get back? Another way to get out of the tainted soul money question, hey?"

"Come off, Frank! You know better. You will find me in the lumber camp waiting and watching for the Bird of Paradise. Is it a go, Frank?"

"Yes, I'll go, and this afternoon at that. But be sure that you don't let your pretty Olaf beguile the secret from you."

"She's on the square even if I did slip a thing or two."

"That may be true, but blood is thicker than water. Remember there are no secrets safe when passed to a second or third party."

"Don't you worry. I'll not spill a word."

The "so-longs" had been said and Conrad knew it would be at least a week before he would need to watch for the big bird and he would make the best of his time and see as much of Olaf as possible.

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The Land of Broken Promise

The days passed. The aeroplane had not appeared. One day Olaf told him of wealth hidden in the mountains far from the Swan Settlement.

"If monsieur should stay here he would be rich — oh, so rich!"

"But my comrade is coming back," he told her.

"And will monsieur's comrade stay also?"

"Not but a little while. There are others waiting and mademoiselle the beautiful lady, is waiting for our return." Then Olaf was silent and she suddenly left him and entered her own lodge. He knew well she would not come out again that day, so he went forth across the forest to the lumber camp to watch for Frank's return. But the next day there came a longing to see and locate the rich field of wealth as pictured by Olaf, so he retraced his steps to the settlement. He whistled as he always did. At first there was no response. Again he whistled, then he saw her appear at the door of her lodge. He waved his hat to her. She slowly wended her way to where he stood.

"Olaf was discontented with me yesterday, but I have come to tell her," he said, "that I will stay and go with her to the mountains where the riches lie."

"And the comrade, has he come also?"

"No, but I will leave a note where he knows he will find word if I am absent when he arrives."

"Then we are to go alone? You think it best?"

"Yes, for we dare not reveal this place to any one else."

But often on their journey he wondered why she had not feared to go alone with him. He did not know that the laws of her people respect the women of their race and any woman is safe, for disrespect means instant death. That night they camped. She told him how to prepare to spend the night while roughing it, although Conrad had learned some of the rough sides of life during his stay at the lumber camp. She made their beds soft with the leaves of

the forest trees. Then she took her blanket and drawing it tightly around her said good-night and lay down on her bed of leaves. In the morning he awoke to find her busy replenishing the fire with wood from which the fragrant smell of coffee ensued. He watched her as she moved here and there. What a beautiful wild bird she was! Then there came a yearning to clasp her in his arms, to always stay with her in that land of rich promises. After breakfast they again wended their way. Another day had come and gone, and as the evening shadows fell and they sat there by the camp-fire she, pointing, tells him that there, only a mile farther, lay their gold. He reaches out, takes her hand and draws her to him. She shrank from him.

"You need not fear, sweet Olaf. I love you. I never loved like this before. My soul is lost. Oh, Olaf, come to me, my love."

"I cannot, Monsieur," and then she withdrew herself from his embrace.

"And why not? Olaf, Olaf, can't you see my very soul cries out for you. It is lost in the intensity of love."

She was looking down, she was trembling and frightened at his outburst, for she was alone with him in the forest, while her love cried out in its yearning for him. Finally she answered him.

"Say the word, mate or wife? In that way only can I come to you, Monsieur. If not that way, I go back as I came, for the wild bird of the camp always keeps her soul white."

"It's wife then, Olaf. Be my wife."

She shyly crept into his arms. He lavished kisses

upon her upturned face. She, patting his face lovingly, and then, as though a sudden thought had come to her, she sprang from his embracing arms. She looked at him with startled eyes. "When shall I be your wife?" she asked.

"Tonight, now," he cried in his passion.

"That cannot be, for there is no one to marry us as the Englishman's law says, nor is there any way to be married as the gypsy law demands. We must go back."

"But in God's eyes we can be united. We can clasp our hands together and promise and these trees and mountains and rills and rocks shall be our witnesses. And then we can go on to our field of rich ore tomorrow. For we cannot go back over all that travel just for a few words, and the gypsy chief would not let you be the Englishman's wife. You will have to run away after all. Come Olaf, come and be my mate."

But she stood steadfast to be married by the laws of her people.

Late the next day they staked out a claim, after Olaf had showed him where the rich vein of gold lay, and day after day he worked to unearth this bright-colored wealth. But one day his conscience smote him. Had Frank come and found him gone? Had he found the gold and gone back, or was the gold he had hidden so carefully still in its hidden bed? If not, what would Frank think of him? Perhaps that he had been false and fled with the treasure. He dropped his pick-axe. "We must go back," he said to Olaf. She looked at him with questioning eyes.

"I have forgotten my comrade. He will be waiting for me to come and show him the way," he said, for he could not tell her of the treasure. "Will you come or stay?"

"I will go," she said, "but we must hide all telltale marks that others will not find it."

Swiftly he worked, covering up all signs of their treasure vein and staking it so it would be easy to locate it again. Then they broke camp and Olaf noticed he was not so gentle as he had been when they journeyed that way before and she wondered if he was weary. She did not know that he was getting tired of the wild bird mate; that he was longing for his former life of luxury and ease; that when he retraced his steps that way again it would be with his comrade and him alone.

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A strange looking object had settled on the Australian soil. But few had noticed its landing and those few were the men in the lumber camp. Swiftly they loaded their treasure. Slowly the treasure ship rose into the air and as high and higher she rose the conscience of Conrad smote him, for behind he was leaving the broken remnants of a woman's love in the land of promise.

CHAPTER XXII

NETTIE'S FLORAL BAND

NETTIE was of an imaginative nature and imagined more than she could realize. She had high ideals and sentimental impulses and an obstinate nature. Lettie had spent a great deal of time with her and by her close companionship Nettie had been greatly benefited. She became more capable of self-control and less impulsive. She had formed great moral and intellectual elements, but was too young for anyone to form a just view of her character. But Lettie nevertheless kept constant watch of her spiritual growth and their little talks together and her traversing into the insight and work of the Good Book had left a great deal deeper impression upon Nettie's pure exalted character than Lettie had yet dreamed of. She often spoke to Nettie of her impulsive nature and the need of more self-control.

"I have suffered much from this same taint in my character and in overcoming this, by perseverance and your self-control you can compensate for much disappointment and perplexities that have been in my own life."

Viola was ideal and sentimental and had not the firm governing force that Lettie evinced in her handling and governing of Nettie, and she did not keep Nettie from grieving over her mother's absence.

And, too, Uncle Frank had disappeared, but as she said, she knew that God didn't like her to grieve and she wanted God's love. Viola was kindness itself but she could see the little girl was in her heart grieving for that maternal love which is every child's gift. She heard from Lettie often and although Nettie was joyous at the reading of any letter, yet her heart felt sore after the reading, as Nettie had said: "I try to stop that feeling, but there's some missing out of me here that makes me want to cry. I try to be brave because God don't want me to grieve and mother wouldn't either."

After a while she again visited the camp. Hoyt was there, and Noyes and Winnegar, but she missed Conrad and Uncle Frank. Hoyt felt for the little girl for her eyes bore that melancholy sadness, so after a while he worked himself into her good graces. But when she insisted upon his going to church, he balked.

"I'd do most anything for you, little lady, but go to church. The ceiling would fall down if I ever went in."

"No, it wouldn't, for God is holding it up."

"But He might not be there."

"He is always there. He's the timber Himself. Don't you know He says in the Good Book 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there will I be in their middle also!' I don't know as they's the 'zact words, but they mean the same anyway."

Hoyt did not care to talk religion, but somehow he liked to hear that little one lisp out the Scriptures in her own simple way. After a while his

conscience began to trouble him. Often after she had left for home the words as she had quoted them left deep impression on his mind and often he would find himself repeating the words over. This day she confided in him a secret. "Do you know, I didn't use to like you, but I love you now."

"But don't you think it isn't proper to tell young men that you love them?" he said jestingly.

"Why, that's all right," was the innocent answer. "Don't you know that we all should love each other? Don't God command us to love our neighbors as ourselves, and aren't you my neighbor?"

"I guess you're right. But how about those that are not your neighbors? You said that we ought to love every one."

"Well, we are all neighbors, aren't we? Aren't we all brothers and sisters in this world? Only you see we are such a large family, God 'vided us up."

"How about Tom, Dick, and Harry, are they counted in your family? Folks that drink, people don't like to call brothers unless they have to, do they?"

"Oh, Dick, Tom, and Harry are in the church now."

"That beats the old Harry, I should say."

"Yes, that's too bad 'bout him, wasn't it?"

"How's that?"

"Why he went to purg — purg — I forgot what they call it, but you know. It's the first bad place they go to."

"You don't mean purgatory?"

"That's the name," she said.

"How did you know that he's gone there?"

" 'Cause mother saw him there."

Hoyt gasped in amazement at her words.

"You see mother went up there. That's 'fore she went to church, and she saw Mr. Harris there and some others she knew, but Mr. Harris felt the baddest and begged to be let go 'cause he got there by giving people short weight."

"Who told you that, Nettie, or did you just think that up?"

"Nobody told me it. I heard mother tell Viola and Conrad 'bout it when I hid under the table to holler Boo! and scare Mr. Conrad. They laughed about it. I wouldn't laugh 'bout being there, would you?"

"I don't think I would, but —" and he stopped short. At that moment exclamations from the others called his attention. Looking to see what the excitement was about he saw that the boss of the camp had arrived from his long extended journey. He hastened to greet him. Nettie was forgotten. No one had thought of her, all being interested in the arrival of Frank.

At that precise moment Nettie's attention was attracted by a gopher twittering to her in its habitual saucy way and she did not notice that Hoyt had suddenly left her and was not aware of the fact until Joe called to her as she was scampering after the little animal. As she took his hand to go home she turned to bid the boys good-bye. She found all had disappeared. As Joe did not wish her to know about Frank's return he made an excuse about the boys' absence and took Nettie across the fields to the ranch.

Although tired from his journey, Frank insisted on getting his aeroplane into order so that he could start as soon as possible on his return journey. To all queries his reply was, "Boys, wait. You'll know in a few days more. I promised Conrad not to tell. I can only say it will be a treasure ship when we land here again."

Some thought of Captain Kidd's treasures, others of a bride, but to all questions he answered, "Wait and see."

The next day found the start delayed. Joe had told Thelma of Frank's return and Thelma had informed Nettie, so when Joe started out for the lodge Nettie begged to go then, instead of a later time in the afternoon. So busy were they all in helping Frank that no notice was taken of their visitor until a little voice cried out, "Uncle Frank, don't you see your little girl?" Frank, taken by surprise, let drop from his hand an instrument he was using and gathered in his arms his little sweetheart. After a while he noticed tears in her eyes. "What are the tears in those little blue eyes for?"

"Oh, them's nothing. Them's not sorry ones. Them's tears of joy."

"Well, I'm glad of that. But now I've got to go to work again, Nettie, so you will excuse me, won't you, for I've got to get away as soon as possible."

For the first time she noticed the odd looking machine.

"Is that your 'speriment, Uncle Frank?"

"I think it is, dearie, and I'm busy getting it ready to fly away with. But I'm not going to stay long. I'll be back before you know I'm gone."

"Don't you fly with it. 'Speriments don't be safe, you know."

"This will be, for I have made the experiment safe, so don't worry, little girl."

"And will you get a medal this time?"

"Something better than a medal, Nettie."

"Then it must be God's love, for mother says that's better than all the medals you can get if it's carried in your heart."

"It's too earthly to be called that, rather the opposite, I am thinking. It is what makes life worth living to the majority of the people. It's the one important thing of their lives."

"Then, it's my daddy, for that's the one part of my life. Tell me truly, Uncle Frank. Is it my daddy you have found?"

"No, Nettie. You don't know how it hurts me to say that word to you. I wish it was your daddy, it would be the best treasure that my flying ship ever carried."

Nettie was silent. Her hopes had been dashed in bitter disappointment to the earth.

Everything was ready. He bent and patted her on the head. Then the words "Ready, boys!" and away he sailed until lost in the far distance like a mere speck upon the blue sea of clouds. And as he navigated his airship the words, "lots of God's love in your heart is better than a medal" were ringing in his ears over and over again.

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Nettie had become greatly interested in the Belgian Mission Relief. Everybody was working

for it, and after Viola had returned from one of the meetings she plied her with questions.

"Why can't we have a Home Mission, Aunt Viola? There's lots of poor people here and I heard old lame Mrs. Percival say that there's as much need for good work here; that we need not go looking for it in countries away off. I wish our Jack and Jill's Club could form a mission and do for our poor."

"Capital idea, Nettie! That's just the thing for your Jacks and Jills to think of. You could all get together and form your ideas, but let the older ones be the leaders."

"I's found my ideas already."

"What ideas, dearie?"

"Why, our Floral Helping Club; to go see the sick and take flowers and see them ourselves. Then perhaps we could get some pennies to do better things than that. Can I call the Jacks and Jills together, Auntie, and work right away and not wait?"

"If you wish, dearie, but let the older ones suggest the best plans."

Nettie hastened away to tell her plans to her friends.

Kitty, Paul, John, Emiline, and Nettie were eager to put the plan into action and in time to add to their numbers and they started out that very weekday. The first to visit was Mrs. Dalby.

"I wouldn't go in there," spoke up Kitty. "She won't open the door an inch. No one has dared call on her since her little boy died."

"Then we ought to go there," said Nettie.

"There isn't any of us that's eager for the job," said John.

"Then I'll go alone," and Nettie went up the steps and knocked at the door. No one came. Again she knocked. It opened the inch the others had said it would. A sour face peered out. A sourer voice said, "What's wanted?"

"Just these flowers. I wanted you to have them, 'cause you have sorrow in your heart."

"Who put you up to it?" came in irritated tones.

"No one, 'cept it was God did it," spoke up womanly little Nettie. The door opened wider; a hand reached out and took the flowers.

"'Spose I had ought to thank you, but no knowing what's back of this." She spoke bitterly.

"I guess, Mrs. Dalby — isn't that your name?" She nodded her head in answer. "That it's love in back of it, 'cause there's fairies in those flowers and I love them all, but you see I want others to know and love my fairies too. That's why I brought some to you, 'cause I knowed you'd have sorrow in your heart cause you didn't have any little boy and I didn't have any daddy, and I send messages through my fairy flowers to God and my daddy."

The teardrops began to gather in Mrs. Dalby's eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Dalby, I didn't mean to make you feel sad; I meant to make you glad."

Just then Mrs. Dalby spied the other children.

"What's those children out there gaping at me for? Where did they come from?"

"Why, they —" began Nettie, but Mrs. Dalby

had slammed the door to. Again she knocked. Slowly it opened.

"Well, what's wanted now?" the surly voice inquired.

"Just to tell you I'm coming again and I hope you'll 'vite me in next time I come. I want to be your friend."

"I don't have any company now; I haven't since —"

"That's what everybody told me, but you know that I'm one of your sisters and God wants us to be one big family. Can I come next time?"

"Yes, I 'spose you can. You may likely come in and you may likely not get in. I've no children and I ain't botherin' others'." And she closed the door.

Nettie went down to the others.

"Gee! but you got more outen her than anybody else ever did," said John.

"She's a sour one," said Kitty, "and if any one can win her over Nettie surely will."

"I'm going to try. The fairy flowers will help me," said Nettie..

The next place was Martha Perkins'. "Oh, my! But you're up against it this time sure," said Paul. "She's a pickle of an old maid; been in the brine since she lost her old sweetheart long before any of us was born. Who's going up to see her?" he called out.

"Not I," said John. "Not I," said Kitty. "Let Nettie and Emiline go."

Nettie agreed. There was no fear in her. She only saw the right and duty of it all. But Emiline

trembled as they stood at the door of the little house.

"I — I — can't speak a word — I'm so scared," whispered Emiline. "You'll have to do the talking, Nettie."

The door opened and a middle-aged woman stood before them. She peered over the edge of her spectacles.

"Good morning," said Nettie. "I brought you some flowers from my garden."

"Huh!" was the reply. But she took the flowers and peering at them from every side, her fingers touched the fuchsias in a caressing way. Nettie waited expectantly for her thanks.

"Who told you to bring them?" she said.

"Nobody 'cept God put it into my heart. I want to be kind to every one who's in sorrow."

"I ain't got any sorrow calculated to hurt anybody's feelings," she commented.

"Course not, not now, perhaps, but they do say you lost all you ever loved and that's why you never feel like you used to, to others. And you see these flowers bring good to everybody 'cause flowers love kindness and tenderness. That's why they grow so nice for me, 'cause I love them — every one."

"Then why don't you keep them when there's no one asking you for them?" came the unkind query.

"'Cause there's no poor man's funeral to send them to and mother says any way it's better to give them to the living."

Nettie, noticing her fingering the fuchsias, added: "You like them kind of flowers, don't you?"

"Yes," she answered, "but who told you that I did?"

"No one. I noticed how kindly your fingers held them and something told me the rest."

"Huh!" she said.

"May I come to see you some time? If you will let me I will save you all my fuchsias."

"If you want to, I've no objections. Children don't generally take to me. You won't ever want to come again."

"Perhaps I will, 'cause you see I'm an odd one, that's what Aunt Viola says."

"I guess she's right. There's not many like you that would bother to come and see Martha Perkins that's called 'Old Sour Pickles.' I guess they're right; I'm sour enough."

"I guess they didn't keep you in the brine so long after all. I don't call you sour."

"What's that? They didn't keep me — ?"

"Why, until you are awful sour. I think you're sweeter than Mrs. Dalby and my flowers will teach you more kindness when you're 'quainted with them, like I be. We'll come and see you again when we don't have so many to go and see. We have to go and see old lame Phyllis now. And it's away down in the hollow, so good-bye, Martha Perkins."

"Good-bye, Miss —"

"Oh, I forgot to 'duce myself. I'm Nettie Merriman and I've nobody but my mother, so I have to scrape 'quaintances with other Jacks and Jills. That's the name of our club too. I'm not the head of it, but you see the others is 'fraid of you cause they said you was sour. But they didn't get

'quainted with you and find the sweetness like I did. That's why, you see. Good-bye. I'll bring fuchsias next time."

"It's a good thing, Nettie Merriman, you and Emiline got back safely without your head being taken off you," greeted John.

"Why, she wasn't ugly one bit, was she, Emiline?"

"No — not exactly, but the way she looked at you when you called her sour."

"Well, she said that's what the others called her, didn't she?"

"Well, you just wait until you call there again," said Paul.

"I'm going there again. I like Martha Perkins, so there! It's those kind that God wants us to go and be kind to. They need us more than any one else. Pooh! What's there to be afraid of? Isn't God guiding us when we do what's right? Besides the fairies in my flowers won't let any one harm us."

"Now for old lame Phyllis," said Kitty.

"You're not going away down there? We'll never get back home," said John.

"Yes, we will, 'cause Viola said she'd send Martin after us if we got that far."

"That far! Didn't she know for sure you'd go that far?" said Paul.

"She said something like, I'd have a strong heart and will if I got beyond Mrs. Dalby's. She never knew any one to get in talking distance of her. And the house is always shuttered and closed as though no one ever lived there."

"Perhaps she didn't expect you to go that far. We'd better turn back," said John.

"And leave the best of them all without any flowers?" spoke up Kitty. "It wouldn't be right." So on they went.

Phyllis was glad to see them. Her personal appearance could have been more interesting, but behind it all she had a kind heart. She loved flowers and she encouraged the Jacks and Jills in their kind act, and told them that their own presence added more to the deed. Many people sent flowers to the sick, which they appreciate, but more would they appreciate the givers' presence. Those who are shut out from companionship with others long to see the faces of others, to converse with them. They want live, animated beings to see, to be in the presence of. "Your mothers, your aunts and cousins can all benefit by your example. By not only sending gifts to the ill, the unfortunate but also lend their presence. It is more Christianlike," she said.

"But there's fairies in my flowers. They will carry your messages for you when they fly away," said Nettie. "And then God, — He's with us always."

"Blessed child!" said Phyllis. "I don't know but you're right. But they are the unseen, our beliefs and faith. But we also love those in flesh and love to be in their presence once in a while."

They left Phyllis, feeling grateful to her for her interest in them and promising to come again.

"She's all right," they said, "but she could be a little neater in her appearance."

"That's one thing; I'm going to ask Viola to give me one of her dresses."

"Yes, but will she wear it?" they echoed in chorus. "She has worn dirty clothes so long she'd hate most awfully to change."

As they came over the brow of the hill they saw Martin coming towards them with a buckboard. "Hurrah!" they cried, as they waved their hats and hands at him. They were all soon piled in the wagon and on their way back. That night Nettie had a promise of one of Aunt Viola's dresses and other articles from her wardrobe to fix old Phyllis out with. The days passed slowly to Nettie, who was eager to again visit her newly found friends. The others said they would visit Phyllis, but were chary in their willingness to visit Mrs. Dalby or Martha Perkins. In the meantime Nettie visited her flowers and coaxed them into blossoming so as to have nice bouquets for each of her sorrowing friends. Viola surmised that she more than coaxed the fuchsias, — that she pulled them open.

Two weeks passed before the floral band started out once more. Again they were at Mrs. Dalby's gate. At Nettie's knocking Mrs. Dalby reluctantly opened the door. Nettie looked at the small opening. "'Taint very big place to get through; I could push through, only 'tain't perlite to enter other people's houses without an invite," commented Nettie.

"Didn't suppose you'd care to come in."

"Course I did, unless you want to talk to me outside. Perhaps that would be the bestest."

"Oh, you can come inside, then outsiders won't be gaping at all I'm doing with my talking to neighbors' kids whom I don't know."

"I don't suppose you do know me very well, but we're going to know each other better, aren't we?" She chatted as she walked into the darkened house. "Oh, my!" she gasped. "It's awful dark in here, isn't it?"

"You'll soon get accustomed to it after you are here a short while."

"But it wouldn't be so dark if you'd open the blinds. Don't you like the sunshine to come in?"

"What's the use of sunshine, when there's nothing but darkness in your heart?"

"But if you would let the sunshine in it would drive the darkness out."

"In the house, yes, but not in my heart."

"Oh, yes, it would. Don't you know that song about 'Open wide the Windows, Let a Little Sunshine in?'"

"Never heard it."

"Perhaps you did and didn't 'stand it more'n I did till mother told me it meant the windows of our hearts and of our bodies. That would make us happy and drive out all sorrow and unkindness, what makes the darkness in us. No wonder you don't feel happy when you stay all locked up in the dark. Do you have water? I'm awful thirsty."

"I'll git you some, that is, if you'll stay here. I don't care for children that I don't know about to be following me all over my house. 'Pears kinda queer to me for unknown people's children coming to see me anyhow."

Nettie did not like the dark room, but to be left alone had no fear for her. Cautiously she pushed back the blinds. The light crept into the room.

Softly she pushed another open. How lovely the sunshine was as it poured into the room.

"Well, of all the nerve! You've the most I ever saw. Who told you to open those blinds?" called out the rasping voice of Mrs. Dalby. Glancing up, Nettie saw the frowning face of the woman and knew she had roused the woman's anger.

"I didn't mean to displease you, Mrs. Dalby. I only wanted to see how the sunshine would look in the room. I didn't really think it would enter after being shut out so many years, but you see it did! Ain't it lovely? Perhaps it would enter your heart just like it did this room. Wouldn't it be beautiful if it did and shine out through your eyes, 'cause mother says your eyes are the windows of your body and they show the light and shadows of our lives and let us know just what's within. I wish I could see that light in your eyes like there is in mother's and Uncle Frank's whenever I come where they are. Do you know I think you must have been pretty 'fore you let the darkness enter. Oh, who's picture is that on that frame what stands upon that thing there? Oh, but it looks like you must have when you were — oh, but you are crying again, Mrs. Dalby. Have I hurt you again? I don't mean to hurt any one. I want to make them glad. Why have I made you cry?"

"Because that's the picture of all I had to love, and when he went, all the sunshine of my life went too."

"'Twouldn't if you hadn't shut it out. Please let the sunshine rest on that picture, on that little boy. Please don't ever shut the blinds again. Don't

you think it makes your little one feel bad to see you lock the beautiful sunshine out?"

"What do you know about sorrow and what I should do? You were spared, he taken, and that's always the way."

"I do know about sorrow. I never had a daddy and I cry sometimes when I see the other Jacks and Jills have their daddy. But I don't shut all the sunshine out. I keep it to share with others. God wouldn't love me if I did. Perhaps that's why He don't care for you. You better let Him in, for His love is the most beautiful thing in the world. Mother says so."

Mrs. Dalby had kissed Nettie's forehead as she bade her good-bye and had promised to keep the blinds open until Nettie came again.

The others were anxiously waiting for her. "My, but we were scared! We thought she'd got you for sure. We started to run back for help when we saw you open the blinds and we saw her come in. But she was mad. You could see her eyes blaze. We expected to see her throw you out the window," said Paul.

"She's let the sunshine in and she's going to let it stay until I come again. She said she would."

"I knew Nettie would do it," said Kitty. "Now to bring Martha Perkins to open her old dried heart up."

Soon they were at Martha's house. All agreed they would rather stay outside the gate, but Nettie went boldly up to the door. Martha opened it. Nettie waited for an invitation to enter. None coming, she offered the bouquet composed entirely

of fuchsias to her. She saw Martha start at the sight of them.

"Did you bring these of your own accord?" she demanded.

"Why, of course I did. The garden's all my own. Joe only helps me to take care of it. I help, too, 'cause if I didn't they wouldn't be truly mine."

"But they are all fuchsias."

"That's 'cause I saw you liked them best when I brought the others."

Martha was silent.

"Don't you like them 'cause they're all one kind?"

"Yes, little girl, I love them better."

"Then why don't you talk?"

"They make me feel sad."

"I wish I hadn't brought them then."

"I'm glad you did. You see, I had a friend once and he used to always bring me these and he went away never to return."

"Was he the one that died and brought the sorrow into your heart?"

"Yes, but who told you that?"

"Mother said you were a noble soul. She wished you wouldn't lock yourself up so. It was sorrow at the death of one you loved made you lock yourself away. I told her the other day she'd made a mistake. It wasn't you that locked yourself up, it was Mrs. Dalby. She said I didn't 'stand things. But you'll be glad — I know you will — to know that Mrs. Dalby has opened up and let the sunshine in until I come again."

Martha gasped at the child in wonderment.

"Now she's done it, why don't you? Let it drive

the sorrow out. Then you wouldn't be sour any more. It would make the lemon go all right, for Emiline said the other day when we went out you'd be just lovely if you wouldn't hold on to that lemon of yours."

Martha tried to hide her chagrin at Nettie's words, and as an excuse she offered to go get some cake and a glass of milk. She offered them to Nettie, who held both hesitatingly in her hands. She did not offer to partake of them but kept looking out the door toward the street. At last she spoke. "I'd like to eat them but I can't when I think of the others out there without any."

"Why, are there others out there?"

"Yes, the other Jacks and Jills."

"Why don't they come in?"

"Because they're afraid of you."

"Well, suppose you tell them to come in. I rather you would. You get them to come in while I get the rest of them something to eat, then they won't know I did not think of them at first."

"But God knows you didn't, don't He?"

"I suppose so, but you see I didn't know they were out there."

"Then you can say so. God might like it better than deceiving them."

In they flocked, encouraged by Nettie. Martha entered the room with cake and milk ready for the guests. Hungry and thirsty, they eagerly devoured it all. All but Nettie. In between bites she chattered away. Sometimes in favor of her companions, sometimes otherwise, as when she hastily spoke up: "Now, Paul Kurnow, you can't never

again call Martha stingy-hearted, 'cause she's proved she ain't." Paul wiggled around in his chair looking for an opening in the floor through which he might fall. Martha tried to smile, but it was a sickly smile for she had forgotten how to give a good one. When they left, Martha had asked all to come again.

"Another added to our band!" cried they all.

"Mother would say, 'Another jewel for my crown,'" said Nettie.

Old Phyllis greeted the children in an old-fashioned, crude way, but the children liked her despite her slack personal appearance. Nettie almost wished the others had stayed out so she could have fixed Phyllis up, for Nettie had brought along a bundle which had been a source of much curiosity on the part of the others. She managed to get it to Phyllis unobserved. Old Phyllis gave them many rules and much advice for the help of their club, telling of those here and there who would be pleased at their visit and telling them that it was the better part of duty to keep charity at home among those we know; that we should do for those dearer to us and after that had been accomplished we could do for those in the far-off country. This made them more eager than ever to do for those around them. Again as they started for home, Joe met them and delivered them, safe each at his own door.

Viola felt that this club would be one helping point in the character building of Nettie, but she also found that Nettie was apt to pick up slang when Nettie told her of the drawing out of the lemon

in Martha, but after explanation in regard to these words and the inadvisability of using them she felt sure Nettie would avoid their use in the future and would correct the habit of their use in others.

The next day after the Jacks and Jills had paid their visit, Nettie insisted on going to Phyllis's, either with Joe or her Aunt Viola. After conversing with her in regard to it, she thought it best that Joe take Nettie over as she could best undertake the improving of Phyllis without her presence. Phyllis was surprised to see Nettie so soon again. Nettie at once brought the subject of her visit to the point. "Phyllis, I want you to put on that dress I brought over yesterday. I want to see how it looks."

"Why, honey, that dress is too nice for me."

"No, it isn't. Nothing's too good for you. You just put it on, Phyllis, 'cause I want the others to see you in it when they come again and I want to see if it's all right on you, 'cause if it ain't mother's got another one."

Phyllis put on the dress, but something seemed lacking. "I guess it's the underskirts, dearie," said Phyllis. "It hangs too slimpsy." Then again she put it on over her skirts. It looked right this time, only somehow things didn't look like when mother was fixed up in them. Finally Nettie bade Phyllis good-night, saying, "I'm going to bring Aunt Viola over. She said I best come alone. You might not like her to be here. Perhaps you'd refuse to dress up. But she's just got to come, Phyllis. There's something wrong. I can't dress you up to look like mother does."

Viola came; she saw and conquered. It was

Phyllis's odd way of dressing her hair that made the great difference in her appearance. After Viola had shown her how to improve on that style of coiffure, great was the contrast between her past and present personal appearance. As Nettie said, "Why, you are really pretty now."

"It's nice, Lassie, to hear ye say so, but nothing can make old lame Phyllis pretty, not even in the sunshine what made Mrs. Dalby shine forth in loveliness."

"But faith and hope and the striving for," said Viola in that quiet and naïve way of hers. And in time Viola proved that she was right, for Phyllis became one of the neatest women, taking great pride in her personal appearance. Viola also took interest in Phyllis's physical disability, which was the result of a neglected broken limb. It was re-broken, re-set, and Martha Perkins proved a capable and valuable nurse, working in the interest of the Floral Helping Hand Band of Jacks and Jills, and when Phyllis was able to have the use of her limb again she spent most of her time between Martha's and Minnie Dalby's, where the entering of sunshine had worked great changes.

Between Phyllis's and Nettie's home a wireless signal had been instituted. It was composed of the waving of a towel at a certain hour in the morning from the upper window of Phyllis's little home, with a vigorous wiggling in response from the window of Nettie's room, and every morning the first thing Nettie would look toward the east watching for the signal.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SILENT SIGNAL

NETTIE had been asking questions all day about Mr. Prentiss. She was sure Viola was going to love him best, for she had seen Mr. Prentiss with his arms around Viola and she had heard him say, "How long shall I wait?" and Viola had replied, "When the tragedy of my cousin's life is ended." And then she had heard again only the words, "I cannot explain. Time alone will tell you the facts." Nettie was too young to grasp the meaning of these sentences.

"Now, Aunt Viola, which would you like the best for your little girl's daddy of all the mans you like?"

"Which do you like best, Nettie?"

"Well, let us say Mr. Conrad, Mr. Hoyt and Mr. Prentiss."

"I won't put Mr. Prentiss there, 'cause he's the best anyway, so that only leaves two I do like. I did like Mr. Conrad best, but since Mr. Hoyt got civilized, I like him as well, but, Aunt Viola, why don't you ask your heart. If that can't tell you, perhaps God can. I don't have to live with him, it's you that will have to do that."

"Of course I know which I like the best, but you are such an odd one. You read characters from the face and you generally guess right."

"Perhaps it's 'cause I might have gypsy blood in me."

"Who has been telling you things, Nettie?"

"Nobody that I know of. I only think."

"Then don't think that way any more. Aunt Fanny would be sorry to hear you speak that way."

"Then I won't say it again, for I don't want to make any one sorry. I want to make them feel glad, for mother says there's sorry enough in this world without making any more."

"Your mother is always saying nice things. I sometimes wish she did not shut her eyes to her own happiness."

"Did she do that, Aunt Viola?"

"Once upon a time I'm afraid she did."

"Perhaps that's why she is always opening people's eyes to their happiness, for mother always says the sin is not in making the first mistake, but in making it the second time. But sometimes I find her with tears in her eyes; then I know something has made her unhappy."

"Perhaps it's when she thinks you have deceived her or done wrong."

"But I never did that, only once."

"And that once was probably when you found her afterwards in tears."

"No, 'twan't either; it was long before that. It was when I and Uncle Frank peeped in the window."

"What did you peep in the window for and why did you deceive her?"

"I can't tell you, Aunt Viola, because I promised not to tell. Uncle Frank said it was not deceiving;

if I didn't say anything, why I wouldn't have to answer anything."

"Will you tell me one thing: when was it you peeped in the window?"

"The night mother looked so beautiful at the big Jack and Jill time."

"And who is Uncle Frank?"

"You said I had to answer but one question and I answered that; but this one don't make any difference 'cause I don't know who he is. Conrad says he's the best man that God ever put a soul into."

"You needn't answer any more, I will see Conrad."

"You can't, he's gone to take care of Uncle Frank."

"I can wait. We may yet find some one for your daddy."

"No, he didn't find him; he told me so."

"You certainly are the most old-fashioned child I ever came across."

"That's what Hoyt said. Say, Aunt Viola, do you honestly and truly love little children?"

"Love them: I just adore them, and if I ever have a little girl like you the earth won't be large enough to hold me."

"Then don't marry Mr. Hoyt. He don't care for them, that is, he didn't at all, but he feels better about them since knowing me. But if I was you I wouldn't 'pend on that feeling. There's 'ceptions, you know."

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The next morning the wireless failed to respond to frantic wigwagging, for Nettie was ill. To her

Aunt Viola she said: "I didn't send the wireless this morning so she'd know."

"What wireless, Nettie?"

"Why, the one between Phyllis and me. She always waves the towel to show she's been spared another day and I wave back to show her the angels took care of me another night. I always watch for her, but I didn't wave this morning so she'd know I wasn't feeling well. Won't you carry me up to the garden and let me gather the flowers for Mrs. Dalby?"

"Let the flowers stay a day or two, dearie, they will be more lovely in their full strength and beauty when you are better able to go to your garden."

"But, Aunt Viola, it's today I need them; it's the 'versary of the day Mrs. Dalby lost her little boy and there's no one but I ever dared to send flowers to his mother. But she never minds me."

"Why can't I gather the flowers and send them somehow? Where does this woman live?"

"Down in the big house under the knoll, what used to be all shutted up, since they carried the little one out, until I opened them up. But you must take the right flowers, Aunt Viola, the ones he loved. I keep a clump of them growing for him; they are the garden pinks up near the big rose bushes. And, Aunt Viola, please pick some fuchsias for old Martha Perkins."

"Has she lost a little one too?"

"She's an old maid, so she couldn't lose any little boy, but she lost her sweetheart and she was sour to everybody but me. But they don't know her as I do, 'cause if you could see her inside she's as good

as can be, but she keeps it all locked up and I guess I'm the only one she ever showed her good parts to and I always save fuchsias for her. But you must go with the flowers yourself, Aunt Viola, 'cause Phyllis says it's all right to send flowers to the sick and unfortunate, but it's the better way to send your presence with them, for these people long to see other faces — they who are shut up by themselves so much. She says it's just like a house, — pictures, rugs or bric-a-brac can't make a home; it's life and love makes one. A cat, a canary, two geraniums, a Bible, an old rocking chair, may make one of the loveliest homes in the world; so you best go so's to have something with life to go with the flowers."

"Dear little girl. Any one can stick seeds in the ground, but not every one can plant charity, life and love in fellowman on this brown earth like you do, Nettie."

Nettie appeared to be so ill that Viola resolved to send for her mother. To Phyllis's vigorous wig-wagging of the signal there had been no response. She quieted her misgivings that something unusual had occurred at the ranch by the thought that in some way, maybe, Mrs. Merriman and the little missis had been called away, but as the day wore on she could stand it no longer and started on foot to find out for sure the real situation. She stopped at Martha's home and confided in Martha her fear that something had occurred to the little missis, "for she was so much like a little angel the last time I saw her I just thought to myself, that child isn't going to stay long in this world; she's too good to

stay here; always thinking of something good to say to each and every one; forgetting her own little self in the good deeds for others and always teaching in her childish way something from the Good Book, so I've just got to go and find out."

"Better let me go, Phyllis; I'm younger than you."

"No, if it's my little missis I'm going to be the one to be right there," and off she started.

At Mrs. Dalby's she stopped just to tell her she was sure something was wrong at the ranch.

Martha hurried up her housework and started to go and see what Mrs. Dalby thought of the affair.

"Why, Martha, you know Phyllis is getting old, though I declare she looks younger than ever since the little missis has taken her into hand. I think possible that Nettie forgot her usual signal, for if anything had occurred we surely would have seen some one going by from the ranch. I think there's hardly any need of Phyllis going up."

"I think I'll stay until Phyllis comes back, if you don't care, and walk back with her."

"I certainly will be glad of your company and hope for our sakes Phyllis doesn't come right back, unless it is to let us know it is all right up there. To tell you the truth, Martha, I'm a little worked up over this myself."

"I shouldn't worry, time will tell. If she doesn't come back within the time we think she should we ourselves will go up." And in a short time they were chatting away about the doings and sayings of the day.

Phyllis's repeated ringing of the bell brought Viola

to the door. Phyllis knew at once by the expression on Miss Minor's features something serious had occurred.

"Why, Phyllis, why did you come?"

"I missed her signal this morning. I tried to quiet my misgivings but I just couldn't, so off I trotted all the way. What's the trouble, Miss Viola?"

"She's ill. I don't really know. I sent for her mother. I think the child has worried a great deal of late. She has been denied the privilege which she has been in the habit of enjoying: that of going over to the lodge. I think this has worried her. I don't know what else to lay it to."

Phyllis began laying her wraps aside.

"I'm going to stay, Miss Minor. You didn't ask me to, but it's me loves the wee little lamb. I can help if it's only a little."

Up the stairs they went to the little chamber. Phyllis gently laid her hand on Nettie's head and shook her head knowingly. Nettie opened her eyes. "Oh, it's Phyllis. I thought it might be him. I knew if he knew he would come."

"It's me, honey. I don't know nothing about him, but if it's your own daddy that you're wanting, I'll get him for you if the Lord will only show me the way, for it's old Phyllis that would give her life for her wee little lamb if needs be. Now I'm going to work and make you better; cool that little head of yours." And Phyllis's helping hands went willingly to work to relieve the little sufferer.

Phyllis had not returned as yet. Mrs. Dalby and Martha began to look with anxious faces toward the

road that led to the ranch. "Martha, I can't stand it any longer. I'm going up."

"Then I go too. I've been waiting for you to suggest going for the last fifteen minutes."

At the ranch, to Martha's and Mrs. Dalby's suggestion that they be allowed to help, Viola had to refuse. "Phyllis is with her now," she said, "for tonight. Tomorrow I may need one of you, perhaps both, but I sincerely hope by that time she will be better."

Mrs. Dalby tenderly laid her hand on Viola's shoulder. "You don't know how I love that child. If anything should happen — well, I never could stand another sorrow."

"Never shut the sunshine out again, no matter what happens," spoke up Martha. "You know what the opening of the windows of your heart has been to Nettie Merriman."

"I know and I know what she's been to me, to my life, and now I can't do for her."

"We all know what she's been to us all. She was too good for such as us."

"I'll stay at Mrs. Dalby's tonight, Miss Minor. You send for us if you need us. No, you needn't send, just wave a lantern. We will wave back or set a candle in the window. We'll be watching. We will come."

Viola, bending over the little bed, whispered softly to the sick child, "Dear little sower of the Master's words, your seeds have brought forth fruit. No chaff among it — so like Lettie's."

CHAPTER XXIV

HIS BROTHER'S SIN

HAROLD MATHEWS had taken the opportunity of his double's absence to try and secure the design of the aeroplane which he believed to be an improvement on the one which was supposed to be sold to the European government. Not knowing of the other Mathews' return he was busily intent on drawing the design of the mechanical parts, when the door suddenly opened and his own counterpart entered.

Howard Mathews stared in amazement at the figure before him. He drew his hand mechanically across his brow as if to disperse a shadowy image before him which he conceived must have been caused by his late illness. Advancing toward that form he met him face to face. He stood transfixed. He had seen his own spirit. Then the shadow sprang at him, grasping him by the throat; he felt it was a human and not a spirit hand that was strangling him and he fought to loosen the hold. Round after round they fought; first one then the other had the advantage. Then on the floor a form lay still and the other gazed down into a human face which was as a mirror reflecting his own. He ran his hands through his hair. Had he become a maniac, haunted by his own shadow, or was he in a horrible nightmare?

"Uncle Frank," called a little voice, "I'm coming

in." Then she gazed upon his features. "What's the trouble, Uncle Frank, are you sick? You're terrible sick, I guess, or are you hurted?"

"Nettie, tell me, is that a man lying there or is it that I have gone clear out of my head?"

"It's a man! Oh, Uncle Frank, it's just like yourself. I'm 'fraid. Oh, Uncle Frank, please take me home."

He tried to reach the door; he staggered as he walked. Suddenly he fell in a faint to the ground. Nettie's scream aroused the camp. In a few moments willing hands helped him to the lodge.

Conrad saw at once that the old wound had been reopened and as Mathews kept rambling about the other fellow, Conrad reassured him that it was not a maniac this time.

"Conrad, I must see that man. I feel sure that he is the man that has been the mystery of my life. I have got to know the truth. I —" As he faltered Conrad, seeing that he was about to swoon again, called for Hoyt, but there was no reply. Every one had disappeared to the shed where Nettie was excitedly telling of that which no one had noticed, — the figure stretched inside the building. "It's the spirit did it," she said. "It's lying there and it made Uncle Frank sick."

"What spirit, Nettie?" Joe asked.

"The one lying there on the floor."

"Winnegar, take the child until I see what is in the shed that she talks about being a spirit."

Winnegar, taking Nettie's hands and trying to comfort her, saw Joe coming out of the building, his face white and drawn.

"By all that's good, are you sure they took the right man — Mathews, to the lodge?"

Winnegar grasped him by the arms and said, "Man alive! Have you gone out of your mind too?"

"I don't know, but if that is not Mathews lying in there then I am mad."

"No, no, it isn't Uncle Frank, it's a bad man, for he snarled like a fox," cried Nettie.

"Stay here with Joe," said Winnegar, as he loosened her hand. "I'm going to see what's up."

As he entered the room he saw the figure of a man trying to rise from the floor. He also was startled at the resemblance in form and feature that the man bore to Frank Mathews, but as he took hold of the man to help him to his feet, he noticed that instead of the frank eyes of the boss they suggested the fox, continually glaring backward with that same crafty look in them. Involuntarily he spoke the name. "Frank Mathews, by all that's good! Only the eyes, — they betray you." Then he spoke up: "Who are you and what are you up to here?"

"One word at a time, stranger. If you will try and ease this suffocating feeling at my throat," and then he paused and placed his hands to his throat as though to loosen that which was strangling him. Winnegar stood gazing at him. No wonder little Nettie thought it was Frank's spirit. A noise at the door attracted his attention. Turning he saw Hoyt standing there.

"Come here and see for yourself this thing," keeping his eyes constantly on that figure that it should not vanish unseen.

"Well," he said, "who are you?"

"Mathews, — Harold Mathews, if it's the name you want."

"You lie," broke from Hoyt's lips. "We've just left him at the lodge. The trick you are up to we have not yet learned, but we are going to know and know soon and you will go with us before an officer to explain and you will give us your real name at that."

"I'll go with you, gentlemen, and I made no false statement either when I said I was Harold Mathews."

"Then who in thunder is the other Mathews?"

"Why, his name is Frank," spoke up Joe.

"Bring him along," spoke up Hoyt. "Mathews may be able to see him."

As they neared the lodge Hoyt advised them to stay where they were at present until he went in and found out what condition Frank was in. "We do not wish to excite him," he said.

Entering the door he beckoned to Conrad. "Conrad, come here if you can."

Conrad turned. "You're a nice bunch, you are, to go and leave me alone with such a case on my hands."

"Sorry, but we had the other fellow to look after."

"The other fellow! Then that's what the boss has been raving about."

"Is he able to see the other one? He's outside and declares that he's Harold Mathews himself."

"The deuce he is. Wait until I see what Frank says."

"Do you feel able to see him, Frank? I must tell you that he has your own name and personality."

"Yes, I must see that man if it kills me. I'm glad that I didn't kill him."

Silently the group entered the lodge. Frank gazed up at his likeness. The double saluted. "I'll throw up the sponge; you won out on the count."

"Sit down," commanded Frank.

"Thanks, I think I will. I feel tired after our little bout."

"I see you are game all right, stranger. I feel used up myself. My name is Mathews, and I'm called Frank here. By the way, yours is —"

"Harold Mathews, at your service."

The boys were closely watching Frank to see how he would take this announcement. For a few moments there was silence, then Frank said, "I believe it. Your mother's name was Rosaline Parker Mathews."

"Correct."

"Did you know a woman by the name of Emiline Bishop who was or was not your legal wife?"

"I do and I'm thinking she is my wife."

"Thank God, the briars are removed, but too late for my happiness. Tell me —" He had fallen back unconscious on his pillows. Silently and swiftly they worked over him to bring him back to consciousness.

"Conrad," he whispered, as he came to, "I'm thinking I'm a bit knocked out. Suppose you give me a bracer, for I've got to finish with that fellow."

"You let the fellow go until later. If you don't you will pay for it with a severe illness."

Conrad sent Hoyt to get some brandy and when he came with it Frank eagerly drained it.

"Now you keep still for the next twenty-four hours and then we'll let you have this thing out. For the present, I am boss here and you'll have to obey my orders." But Frank was determined to have the whole truth of the matter at once.

"Please, old pal, comrade, let me see the man again."

"Not on your life!"

"By Halifax, I will! I can't rest until I do. Conrad, you've got to let me see him." He pleaded until Conrad gave his consent. As the double entered the room, he greeted the other with a sarcastic smile on his face.

"Well," he said, "here I am again at your service. Your guest, or your prisoner, as you wish."

"Sit down, Mathews," said Frank. "By the way, Conrad, I'd like another tonic before this beastly job is undertaken."

"Might offer your prisoner a little, also," spoke up the other.

Frank nodded in the affirmative and Conrad left the room.

Frank took advantage of the situation. "I believe you are of the same blood as myself, but the reason for your attacking me, I'm not quite up to."

"I was after what to me would have been a fortune and I believed you had spotted me. I might as well own up. I wanted the design of your invention."

"The English government has that. I've not even a copy of it. I was made to destroy everything in handing my rights over to them. You must have been mad to even have thought of such a scheme."

"I think not. If I could have got the designs and sold them to the German government my intentions were to trick them and in so doing make a small fortune for myself."

"That was your game then. While it might have been a good one, it is a pretty low game for a man with Mathews blood running through his veins to stoop to."

"Here's your tonic, sir," said Conrad, and he handed to each their portion.

"Might have made mine a little larger dose. This is hardly a taste," craftily said the prisoner.

"I'll get you more if you want," spoke up Conrad. "It might oil up his tongue," he added in a low tone to the others. And Conrad leaving the room soon returned with an extra portion.

"Now leave him to me," said Frank, "but stay nearby in case I have another weak spell."

"Now, my namesake, what got you into such a hole and why did you leave the woman in such difficulty if she was your legal wife?"

"I'll give you my story only on one condition, and that is that you make me your guest instead of your prisoner."

"I'll do that on one condition."

"At your service. Fire ahead."

"That you hereafter keep your hands off me and tell nothing but the truth."

"If I can, you mean."

"You can if you wish to."

"All right, it is a 'wish to,' I'll do my best."

"Then fire away and don't go round the road, for I feel intensely bad."

"No profession, all but death staring me in the face and a nasty mess all around. I wonder why I did not try to hold myself together, be honest and fight my way through. I suppose I haven't it in me. I wasn't the right material at the start. There has always been a black sheep in our family, either a man or a woman born without morals and I happen to be the man of this generation. I always knew what was right and liked it, but I always did what was wrong and liked it, nearly always. I was always getting in a hole and when at last I found myself in one and a wife to support, I bolted. If I were to write down all the decent things I have thought all my life and the indecent things I have done, no one would believe one and the same man was responsible. I am one of those men who ought to be put somewhere above such tempting things. Well housed, well fed, all comfortable living provided. Then I would do big things. The love of a woman like I had ought to make a man of me. Yet I stole, if it could be done, and risked my neck in doing it, to say nothing of family honor and other things; and the woman, well —, I had to tell her when I found out that she was desperately in love with me, that I was poor. I said to her, 'I'm as poor as a church mouse. I've not ten days' support to my name.' 'You can have my life,' she said, 'have it as long as you live. Love can do anything. We'll be married tomorrow.' 'That's rather difficult,' I said. 'You see I am a Catholic, you are a Protestant. No one would marry us, I am afraid, at least, not at once.' 'Well, we can go away into the English province of Upper Canada,' she an-

swered. 'Well, then it won't make much difference. We'll be in a fix anyway, one way or another.' She insisted that we could be married afterward by the curé if anybody made a fuss. The bishop would give us a dispensation. I told her to wait until I could go and see what could be done. Well, you know, it's the old story and after a while, when my passionate love had cooled off a little, I got ready to scoot out for a vacation and to scare up a little money. Of course, she objected and then I called a farce off: told her of getting a chum to play the part of a minister, etc., but still she clung to the belief that she was my legal wife."

"You scoundrel!"

"Oh, don't get fired up. It's all right now. I wanted to get into this little game, and so when I came back to tackle yours and make money for my little family, I looked her up. I guess she heard that I was married, for when I located her permanent quarters, walked in and called her by name, she paused from her attention to a heap of dry goods and looked up at me with sudden fear in her face. 'You're not married!' then suddenly she added, 'I don't care if you are. I love you. I don't want to know, I don't care.' And later I found out that the dry goods she was tending to was a youngster resembling the Mathews branch of the family. I did the right thing. I told her the truth. I was legally married to her years ago."

Frank was fast sinking into oblivion as his brother ended the story and things were beginning to go around before his eyes. He managed to call "Conrad, quick!" Conrad saw at once the seriousness of

the case, and ordered Winnegar to get a doctor at once. While Winnegar was after the physician, Conrad tried in every way to bring the patient back to consciousness only to have him go from that into deliriousness. When the doctor arrived, he shook his head at the seriousness of the case.

"You need a woman nurse here," he told them. "If some of you will come back with me in a conveyance, I think I can find a good one for you."

At that moment a man stepped forward. His appearance startled the physician who thought the sick patient in his delirium had left the bed.

"I am a blood relation to the sick man and I can get a woman who will be capable and will do all that you desire."

"That would suit me, that is, if you can get her here at once. Don't delay."

As the doctor left Harold prepared to follow.

"No, you don't," said Winnegar, "I'm up to your game."

"I'll give you my word that I will come back again with a nurse. I'm to blame for this man's illness and, by Jove! I'm going to stick by him and see him through, I'll shake on that."

"I don't shake hands with any scapegoat. If you leave this lodge I'll go with you. A fox may change his fur, but his habits never!"

"Perhaps not for a being like you who calls himself a man, but there are human men who can change one who resembles that most cunning of animals to which you compared me and extend to that one friendship and a chance to make good. I cannot forget the sacrifice he has made for me in the

past years. If I did it would be one of the incomprehensible mysteries of this mysterious universe. A man who could do that is either insane or more ungrateful than a fox, my wise friend. A fox can change his fur; it may and can change its habits. '*Noth kennt kein Gebot,' Bon ami.*"

Conrad followed the doctor to the door. He had not heard the prisoner's offer. He had been thinking hard for the last few minutes.

"Say, doctor, I think I can get a good woman to come here at once, and the one that can save this man's life. If I can't get her," he added, "I will send one of the boys right down."

"But we haven't got accommodations for a woman here," spoke up Hoyt, who well knew the attitude the boss had taken in regard to the presence of women at the lodge.

"Anything would do; nurses are expected to put up with the crude side of life. If you wish to save this man's life you've got to get one and that at once."

At that Conrad left the lodge and went across the field.

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Nettie on her arrival home came running to Viola. She inquired the whereabouts of her mother.

"Where's mother? I've got to have her quickly. Uncle Frank is hurted."

At this moment Joe came up and explained the full particulars and that Mrs. Merriman was wanted at the lodge at once. Viola started to inform Lettie but Nettie was ahead of her.

"Mother, you must go, 'cause Conrad says he saved your life and now you must save his."

"Is it Mr. Joyce that has been injured, Nettie?"

"No, it's Uncle Frank and you must come." And she pleaded with her mother, who cannot understand why this man who hates all womankind wishes to see her. At last she consents to go, believing that Nettie in her excitement must have mistaken Conrad's exact statement. As they start on their way they are met by Conrad who, as he sees Nettie with her mother, understands at once that the message has been partly delivered. Conrad completes the information and adds that the urgent need of the case makes it necessary for him to ask her to aid until they could secure competent assistance from the city. Lettie did not ask him who the patient was or for an explanation of Nettie's message. As they entered the lodge Lettie noticed the artistic arrangement of the room and the many trophies of the hunt that hung on the wall. Joe beckoned to her to come to where the patient lay. She advanced toward the bed, Nettie still clinging to her hand. She felt of his hand. She brushed back the lock of hair from his forehead. At that instant Conrad held a lantern so its rays fell full upon the sick man's features. She uttered a cry: "Howard Mathews, my husband!" and would have fallen if Joe had not caught her in his arms. In a few moments she was calm again. Nettie had heard the words and as Lettie turned to leave the room so that she could collect herself, Nettie cried out, "Mother! it's my own daddy, my very own, for you said so. I knew it all the time, for something here,"

and she put her little hand to her heart, "told me so and made me love him so much more than any one else."

Lettie tried to convince the child that she did not understand, but Nettie was not to be deceived.

"He must be my daddy and when he wakes up I must tell him so."

Lettie, still unnerved, moving as in a maze, addressed Joe in a trembling voice: "I think I better not let Nettie stay, if some one will take her home."

"I think when he comes out of his delirium Nettie will perhaps prove a more quieting nurse than either of us, for he loves the little one."

"Then I will let her stay if you think it best. If you could fix a place where she could rest."

"I surely can."

"Mrs. Merriman," spoke up Conrad, "if it's going to be a severe strain on you to stay, I can call some one else from over the river. I sent for you for I understand the situation and I thought it best you should have the first right to come. I believed it your place and for the best."

"I thank you for your forethought; it may be my place, but Mr. Mathews may be embarrassed when he finds me here."

"As long as it does not embarrass you I will take the blame on myself."

"The doctor, what does he say?"

"That he is in a critical condition. The wound, which is an old one, has been reopened."

"Then he was injured before?"

"Yes, when in Australia he saved a woman from

a maniac's power. A young gypsy maiden's timely appearance saved him from death."

Lettie was listening with interest. "He? Then it was him!"

"Yes, and not the other cowardly scamp she thought so brave and heroic."

"And the other's story was a falsehood?"

"Yes."

"I cannot understand how he came there. Can there not have been a mistake?"

"No, for I was there with him."

"In the morning, if he is better, much better, could I be relieved? I couldn't face the situation as it is now, — not yet, I must have time."

"In the morning another nurse may be here. A relative of Mathews has gone to secure one. By the way, Mrs. Merriman, I hope you may be here when that man returns. I wish you to meet him."

"I will stay," she said, "until he comes."

All night Lettie administered to the wounded man, while Nettie slept the sleep of the innocent. The hours dragged slowly. It was nearly daylight when there came a slight stir from the cot and a voice called, "Joe!"

"I'm here, sir."

"I wanted to be sure. I seemed to hear the sound of a woman's voice and as in a dream I felt her touch me."

"I 'ave a lady here, sir, to help me out a little. You 'ave been preety sick, sir, and you're not to talk, sir, but to keep quiet, sir, and to sleep so as to get your strength back."

"Been quite sick, have I, Joe?"

"Just a little, sir, but you're all right now. I'll tell you all about it, sir, in the morning."

Silence then.

"Joe!"

"Yes."

"I wish my dream had come true."

Lettie stood back near the door, hardly daring to breathe lest he hear her. She was glad when he again relapsed into the calm sleep that told the crisis was past.

As morning broke in the east, Conrad came into the lodge and Lettie spoke to him in regard to securing another nurse as soon as possible. Deep in conversation, they did not notice a little form steal past them and, going to the bedside, gaze into the face of the sick man who slowly opened his eyes.

"You here, Nettie?"

"I'm glad you're awake, 'cause I wanted to tell you that you are my daddy, my truly ownliest daddy."

Sadly he shook his head. "No, Nettie, it cannot be."

"But you be. Perhaps you don't know it, but mother said so. She said you was her husband and she called you a name and she took care of you all night."

"Then, Nettie, I did not dream it, that there was a feeling of a woman's soft hand on my brow and that I heard the low voice of some one of the past."

"No, 'cause you did. It was mother and you don't hate female species any more, does you?"

Lettie, looking in, saw them there.

"Nettie!"

"I'm here."

"I want you, dear."

"I'm not coming, not without my daddy. I'll never go without him. Can't we take him home, mother, and care for him there?"

"But your daddy is not here."

"That's funny; you don't know he is and he don't know he is and you said so last night."

She insisted on Nettie's leaving. Nettie was obstinate. As Lettie took her by the hand, her cheeks flushing, she gazed at Mathews, who was looking at her with pleading eyes. Nettie grasped her mother's other hand and put them both in Mathews'. "Take daddy, too, mother."

Lettie withdrew her hands, her cheeks flaming. As calmly as she could she bade him good-bye, telling Nettie to wait until Uncle Frank is better. As she hastens with Nettie from the lodge she meets the double, with Emily, at the entrance. Lettie is startled at the great resemblance to the injured man whom she had just left. Like a flash the remembrance of the woman's face comes to her, — this woman who was the direct cause of their parting on the eve of their wedding day. Nettie is trembling for she is again seeing in the image of her Uncle Frank with its animal eyes, that which had made him so ill.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

CONRAD was back and forth from lodge to ranch, anxious every day to see the finish of this tragedy of life, but it seemed no nearer the finish than before, and a couple of weeks after Viola's conversation with Nettie when she and Viola had begun to surmise who the mysterious individual might turn out to be, she spoke to him on the subject.

"Conrad, who is this Frank that Nettie calls Uncle Frank, — his true name, I mean."

"Frank, — why — his name is Frank Mathews, — or — I mean Manville."

"Mathews, did I understand you to say?"

"Not exactly, a slight mistake. I think your hearing is defective, Miss Minor."

"It may be. I also may be in the need of attention from an optician by the way, I am never able to see this Frank. How is it he never accompanies the rest of you to our social gatherings?"

"He is very busy experimenting."

"Experimenting with a woman's heart?"

"Not at all. He does not favor the female portion."

"Not openly, but he favors it secretly."

"I do not quite understand your meaning."

"To speak plainly then, why does he go peeping

around in windows? Is that plain enough for you, Mr. Conrad White?"

"Quite so. But I had no knowledge that he was guilty of such an act. I do not know who your informer may be, but I know Frank well. He is no gentleman burglar. Unless you can convince me otherwise I feel you are laboring under a great mistake."

"I am sure I am not, for my informers saw it themselves."

"Would you be willing to give me the time and place that I may vindicate my good friend's name and put him again on an honorable pedestal before your now otherwise vision?"

"On the night of the Harvest Carnival, when Mrs. Merriman was taken ill, I sincerely believe it was his face at the window which caused her to swoon."

"Viola, may I insist on your not spreading this information. You cannot understand the situation that would have compelled this man to have taken such a step. I know him as the best man that I ever have met and I know his secret that has so burdened his whole life. Please do not misjudge him."

"I, too, am sure I know who this man is and I also, Conrad, believe him one of the best men God ever breathed a soul into. You can trust me. And now wouldn't you like to go in and see Nettie? She is convalescing and she would be glad to see some one from the lodge, for she had grieved deeply over her inability to see your mysterious friend, her Uncle Frank, and I am only in hopes that before many more days Lettie Merriman can be induced to let Nettie go over to the lodge. It appears almost

impossible that such a fine woman as she is, philanthropist in every way, should be possessed of such a stubborn will."

Nettie, glad to see Conrad, only craved the more for the one she loved.

"Mother, may I go and see him today?"

"Who, dear?"

"Why, daddy. I want to see and let him kiss me because he's my own daddy now. It's beautiful to have a daddy like the other girls have and I've stayed away so long from him my heart feels sorry all the time."

"Hush, dear. You must not speak like that. You cannot go today, dearie; I must see him first. Perhaps tomorrow you can go. You know I must know for sure if he is able to see us."

Although Conrad wanted to, he dared not intercede, for he felt that this affair must take its own course, long-about way as it might seem to be, and he soon left, promising to come after Nettie when her mother thought it best that she should be allowed to go over.

That afternoon Lettie went over to see Mathews but she went alone. She found him sitting bolstered up in a large easy chair. After the greeting of the day had passed between them she spoke of the object which had brought her there. "I have come to ask a favor of you."

"If it is within my power it will be granted you."

"It is. Nettie is eager to see you and I cannot willingly let her come unless in some way we can prevent her calling you daddy, for she believes you are her real daddy."

"I think you yourself could best do that by telling her who her own father is."

"But I don't know."

"Don't know!"

"No, she is Florrie's child. Over my own birth has hung a cloud. Then came this one, the mystery of Nettie's birth. Most of my friends believe me to be a widow. I did not take pains to inform them otherwise. I may not have done just the right thing but I thought it the best way under the circumstances. I believed you dead, for one night I saw your face at the window. Then again that awful day at Australia and I was trying to find proof that I might reward Joyce for saving my life when in the maniac's power. I was about to make a great mistake and then your illness came and I was told the truth of who had saved my life."

"And who gave you this information, Lettie?"

"Nettie."

"I want to thank you at this time for saving my life, I think you have reciprocated."

"I think not. I only stayed here with Joe. You needed me and I came."

With that, with the unreasonable uncertainty that happens at times in affairs that go beyond reason, he was certain, yet he did not dare to be certain that she still cared for him.

"Then it was the touch of a woman's hand, — your hand, — that brought me back. Was it duty alone that brought you to me that night?"

"When I came I did not know it was you. You see, when I saw twice, as I thought, your spirit, I did not think you were still on this earth."

"It was my spirit, Lettie, for that night when I thought you were lost to me forever, when I saw you in such friendly attitude with Joyce, all the life within me seemed to die."

"Why did you come to Australia if you believed me to be infatuated with Joyce?"

"I followed to protect you. It was my duty."

"But you did not know whence I got Nettie."

"Not until previous to your journey, then Nettie told me the story you had told her of the motherless babe. Instinct told me the rest and I did not think you had asked for a decree. Am I correct?"

She arose. "I must go."

"But you will come again?" he asked pleadingly.

"I think not."

"But Nettie. Can she come? She will need me."

"If she does I will send for you."

As she passed out she met Conrad, who was so eager to tell Mathews his plans that the thought that Lettie Merriman and Mathews may have bridged the gulf between them never entered his mind.

"Frank, I've got it!" excitedly exclaimed Conrad as he entered the lodge.

"Got what? I should say mental trouble by the looks and actions."

"Not by any means. It's this: You wanted to know when we were in Australia what you could do about getting Mrs. Merriman's father's gold crop to her without ruining your own prospects by letting her know you had been following her. I've got a plan. Help with the new institute building, university, or whatever they call it. Help them to get

up a far nicer building than their financial standing will let them build."

"What's needed, Conrad? They have their plans already. How could I possibly butt in at this late day?"

"Good heavens, man! That gold would finish the inside of that building in the most up-to-date style and add other attractions besides. The interest alone on that bunch of nuggets would do it. And then when your cloud had shown its silver lining you could share the rest together."

"You seem to have this planned out. Suppose you step in and see to this thing yourself."

"Much obliged, old friend, but I've let myself be one of those animals of burden the same as yourself, long enough and now I'm going back to the Land of Promises to gather in my forgotten treasure."

"And is that why you have been so restless of late? Got the gold or get-rich-quick fever, have you? Why, for the last week you have been as restless as a young colt."

"I've been between and betwixt. There's nothing like remorse. My conscience wouldn't let me rest."

"What has your conscience got to do with it, I'd like to know?"

"This much: It's a land not only of rich promises, but a land of broken ones as well."

"You don't mean Olaf?"

"I mean Olaf."

"Does Viola know?"

"No, she don't need to. She's going to take the dominie, so I'm free from that entanglement."

"The deuce! You don't say so! Why I thought you or Hoyt would be the one all the time. I must say she played her game well."

"It was a woman's game she played to bring the one she really loved to the point. It ends well for me. I couldn't very well have two."

"But you didn't marry."

"No, but I'm going back to take her as my wife by the laws of my own country as well as those of hers."

"Go, and that at once, for you do not know what desperation may have led her to."

"I start tomorrow."

"Right you are. And after you have righted your greatest mistake look into that ore-veined streak of yours. It may mean great wealth to you."

"Will you come out later if I send for you and help me work it?"

"Yes, if in the meantime another great mistake and another life has not been righted. I am waiting in hope and faith for the ending of this life's tragedy where the hours seem days. Go, Conrad, and make the future count for all the past in your love and kindness."

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A fortnight had passed and at the hill within the camp at Swan's Settlement stood a man. Olaf came out from her lodge. It was removed farther away than it had been before. She came toward the hill, gathering bits of wood as she came. Back of the boulder where he stood she went, but she did not see him. Quickly he hastened around to the side where she stood. She looked up suddenly, startled at the apparition. Then from her hands fell

the fagots of wood. Straight into her eyes he gazed, holding out his arms to her he cried, "Olaf, I have come back for you to be my wife."

Slowly she went toward him, her eyes fixed upon his face, — those eyes eloquent in their pleading for his love.

"Olaf," he said, as she lay within his arms, "we will be married in the sight of the law, by the laws of your people, by those of my country." Slowly she shook her head. "It needs must be," she said, "for you who propose to abide by the laws of the revelation do not love as us who believe in the laws of the universe. Our love of the present is no more steadfast than our love of the past."

"Olaf, my wild bird of the forest. What love must be yours not to condemn me when I must stand in your sight the cowardly thing I am."

"We of our people are taught to trust and wait, for the men of our tribe wrong no womankind unless they invite instant death, for we do not as your people worship the God of Revelations, but the God of the Universe which our surroundings commend to us and we learn to trust each other and wait for the righting of all things."

"Thank God!" he ejaculated, "that my conscience drove me back; that I should make amends for the wrong I have done."

And together they walked into her lodge, no longer afraid to face the gypsy chief. And he told her that night as the evening shadows fell that he was going to secure legal rights to the claim and work it and then he was going to take her back to the East, that his and hers should be born in the

land of the Free, surrounded by all that love and wealth can procure.

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Nettie had begged and pleaded to go and see "daddy" as she now called him, but her mother had put her off from day to day for she had been trying to make up her mind to tell her of her true parentage, for she thought it best, as Nettie would be calling him daddy, and under the strange circumstances, that could not be thought of. But what could she tell her, — only of her mother, for she did not even know her father's name. But something surely must be done. She was trying to solve the way out of this difficulty when Thelma brought in the mail. There was a large envelope addressed in a strange hand. She tore it open to find another envelope which looked as though it had been on a long journey. It was addressed to Mrs. Florine Moulthrop, in care of Mrs. Faverham. She read and reread the enclosed letter. Then she sat down and wrote a short note. She rang the bell for Thelma. "Go and ask at the cabin for the man Nettie calls Uncle Frank. Give him this note and tell him to answer it in person."

Thelma had not known of the new and dear relations between Nettie and Uncle Frank, as Nettie had been forbidden to speak about it to any one, although Joe had given Thelma to understand "there was going to be something doing" before long. In a short time Mathews made his appearance at the ranch. As Lettie appeared at the door he said to her, "I believe you sent for me."

"I did."

"Then I am to believe that the gulf between us is to be bridged?" He caught her hands but she drew away.

"Not yet," she said and the promise and the denial thrilled him.

"You've got to know things. I have a story to tell you, then I want you to read this letter." And she tells him the story of her birth, of her trip to Australia, of her suspicion of his love for Viola, even after she had found out about the other woman and the dark cloud that hung over Nettie's birth. Then handing the letter to him she said "Please read this."

To Mrs. Florence Moulthrop.

DEAR MADAM:

In regard to the enclosed package and the securing of your address, we are sorry to inform you that the man in whose garments these were found was lost in the wreck of the *Alice Lord* which sailed from St. Martin's seven years ago. She was short of provisions when she put into port there and could not get anything but a limited amount of beans. After ten days out a hurricane drove her far out to sea across the Gulf Stream. Almost starved the men left the craft when in sight of land. After days of being driven at the mercy of the gale only two survivors were picked up and after all these years a man's body was found in a cave. It was in a petrified state. The garments had almost rotted away. In the pockets was found a pig's bladder bag in which were three letters and bank notes and according to directions and address found, we have forwarded them to you. Will you kindly let us know if the right party receives them.

Yours truly,
CAPTAIN KEAYER.

Carefully he read the letter as though committing to memory every word of it. Then looking up at her, he said, "And this man they found must have been Nettie's father. I believe this is what I am to understand." Then holding out his arms to her he said, "All mysteries seem clear, Lettie, all clear. Come, Lettie, and don't dream I'll ever let you go again if you still care."

"And now I need your help with governing Nettie," she answered, but there was a happy look in her eyes, a smile on her lips. "Nettie still insists that you are her daddy. We shall need to tell her the truth or she will call you daddy before every one."

"And you are not willing? She calls you mother."

"But I am her mother."

"Legally so? Don't you think that this gulf between us has stood long enough? Lettie, answer me this: Did you marry me for love?"

"I liked you and my aunt insisted on my doing so."

"You liked me but found later you loved Joyce."

"No."

"Then why did you not fulfil your marriage contract?"

"Because I thought you false to another woman. You gave me no explanation."

"Because I could not. But if you still care enough for me to have faith in me I can and will now explain."

"I know the truth. I saw for myself."

"And still you doubt me."

"No, I love you. I learned to love you long before I knew the truth."

"And I, loving you, thought you loved another and I longed so for the love of a woman's heart, the touch of a woman's hand all these years."

"And I loved you long ago. I thought I would die when I thought you had died that night I saw your face in the window and it was only for Nettie that I lived after that."

"Lettie, our heartaches are over. My arms are waiting for you as they have waited these many years. Will you come now?"

Clasped in his arms, their honeymoon had just begun.

Thelma, who had stepped out to call her mistress, stopped short, quickly withdrew and closed the door. Lettie, hearing the door close said, "Oh, Howard, we have forgotten Nettie! She will be so glad."

There was no maid to answer Lettie's call. She had gone to tell Joe that that something had certainly happened and it was Nettie who came to answer her mother's call.

"Nettie," her mother said, "daddy has come for his little girl."

That night the moon in all its splendor looked down on a loving group. Lettie, her head on Howard's shoulder, his arms around her. Nettie lying cuddled in his lap broke the silence, "Oh, mother, it's beautiful to have an own daddy. It's much better than having an Uncle Frank." And snuggling close to her newly found daddy, her eyelids closed in sleep. Silently they carried her and laid her in her bed and as they turned to leave the room Howard spoke: "And now, Lettie, let us finish our

honeymoon with a love grown perfect in passing years, rooted so firm and strong that no storms of life shall uproot it. Where shall we journey?"

"Back to old Connecticut. I want to once more visit that old enchanted fireplace where the gypsy told my fortune only too well. I shall never again feel a fear of that place, for my fortune, though having to pass through black clouds of doubt and despair, has at last found its silver lining in a love which none can put asunder."

He clasped her in his arms and the lovelight in his eyes shone as it had never shone before.

FINIS